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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

POLITICIZED ART: THE POETICS OF DISSIDENT LITERATURE

by

Paul Duncan Morris

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled POLITICIZED ART: THE POETICS OF DISSIDENT LITERATURE submitted by Paul Duncan Morris in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

.....

Supervisor

.....

.....

Date February 12, 1988

Dedications

To Shirley Poff and Duncan Morris

and to

Fraser Stevens

na sana'y matutuhan niyang magmahal ng karunungan

ABSTRACT

The designation of any literature as dissident presupposes a series of assumptions concerning the value, function and very essence of art with each assumption based on the fundamental relatedness of art and reality. This essay will examine the poetics of dissident literature to explore the particular, functional characteristics of this type of literature, and to assess those qualities of dissenting literature which are common to the novel form in general. Starting by placing the dissident novel in a specific cultural and political context, exemplified by the normative literary doctrine of socialist realism, this study explores the authorial creation and reader reception of dissident meanings and significances. It is shown through theoretical discussion and concrete analyses that authors communicate their intentions through literary meanings, and that readers in utilizing a truth-standard interpret these meanings to derive aesthetic and political significances. And furthermore, that the above is demonstratably the case across a continuum of divergent styles: from the documentary to the heightened fictionality of the postmodern novel. The study concludes by indicating how an examination of dissident literature may be indicative of the perennially mimetic, representational quality of the novel form, stressing once again how art and reality connect throughout all the varying styles of the novel.

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is something of a cliché to suggest that the literature of Russia and Central Europe has functioned as an arbiter of social concerns to a degree rarely seen in Western Europe and America. As with most clichés, there is undoubtedly a degree of truth in this assumption--enough certainly to reward further examination. To pursue this question in its entirety however would involve investigation into the function and relationships between almost all aspects of society and culture in each country.[1] Instead, this study will confine itself to but a segment of that larger question. Here, I intend to examine the poetics of dissident literature and to "flesh out" some of the literary issues surrounding the topic, particularly that of the representation of thought and reality in art.

As this study is predicated on the examination of dissident literature, it would seem fitting that a definition of this type of literature were made explicit from the outset. Unfortunately, however, a closed definition of this literature is difficult, if not impossible, to provide. I would suggest that dissidence is more profitably considered within the fluid parameters of description, where the exigencies of degree and kind may be given greatest flexibility. This, for the obvious reason that the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of dissident literature may equally be founded on a variety of extra-literary, external conditions as on the conscious desires of the author. Dissidence should not be considered strictly as a defining substance, but rather a descriptive trait, borne out of the *function* literature is ceded in a given social context. However, it may be said here in general that as a pre-condition of dissident literature there must exist some form of authoritarian, normative literary (and even social) standard which politicizes and condemns any form of heterodoxy, whether it be conscious or unintended, aesthetic or ideological. In the context of this study, I have not

[1]See, for instance, G.S. Morson, "Socialist Realism and Literary Theory," ***The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*** 38.2 (1979): 121-34. In this article Morson indicates the immensity of any attempt to place the functional purpose of socialist realism, as a cultural system, within the whole system of systems which comprises any given society.

deemed it necessary to wrestle too strenuously with the definition of dissidence. Seven texts have been chosen according to their formal and thematic qualities for the purpose of studying the implications of the designation of dissident on literature.

The classification of art as dissident presupposes a series of assumptions regarding the very essence, value and, especially, function of literature. For the simple modifier "dissident" acknowledges a direct relationship between literature and its social setting, reality, and more particularly, a negative representation of its political environment. Once again, this tacit acknowledgement of the relationship between literature and reality opens up into a number of questions regarding the proper social worth of art, the intentions of authors, the cognitive function of literature, and the interpretive reception of readers. Each of these areas is implicated in art which dissents. This study explores these aesthetic presuppositions as a means of examining dissident literature.

Chapter two provides the extra-literary social setting against which this literature reacts or dissents. The post-Stalin era of the 1960s and 1970s in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Poland provides the political setting and, simultaneously, the literary context. As this study is literary rather than political or historic in intent, the aesthetic context is of greatest interest--the political is, to a large extent, expressed through the literary. In each of these countries, the production and reception of art has been consciously institutionalized to accomodate the political goals of the state. By and large, this institutionalization has taken the form of the socialist realist method, the official literary doctrine promulgated and enforced by the state. The second chapter examines the doctrine of socialist realism, not as an historically or cross culturally monolithic doctrine but as one which is nonetheless descriptive, comprised of norms designed to subordinate the will of the writer and the function of literature to the changing political ideals of the Party and the state. The history and central tenets of socialist realism are examined with particular attention addressed to the effect of this doctrine on literary artists. Essentially, it is proposed that the imposition of socialist realism entails the sacrifice of the artist's individual vision of truth to the supposed objectivity of the Party's perception. The artist's conscience and consciousness

converge to facilitate a merger with the ideological goals of the state. The quintessential characteristic of dissidence, therefore, is not necessarily politically motivated meaning but rather the individuality of vision which is politicized by opposition, intended or otherwise, to the socio-aesthetic requirements of socialist realism.

Chapter three develops the necessary theoretical groundwork for the study with an examination of the pragmatic concepts essential (and as stated above, presupposed) in a literary understanding of dissident literature. These concepts constitute a linking of fiction with reality. The intentions of authors are established as verifiable in meanings, integral to the reader's reception and interpretation of the text. Furthermore, it is shown that dissident fiction engages readers in the cognitive act of assessing the truth-value of literature. With the question of establishing a truth-function in dissident literature, this study splits into a discussion of two main forms of assessing truth in literature. This bi-part division into the truth *in* literature and the truth *of* literature is based on the primary assumption that dissident literature is mimetic, representational of the reader's real world. This division also serves to illuminate the two central forms of dissident literature--analytical and investigative--to be discussed with examples in the two sections of chapter four. Although in this study I am stressing the "meaning" oriented forms of dissidence which depend upon an author's conscious intention to dissent, I should also like to indicate the caveat that dissidence may also be occasioned through formal unorthodoxy--a point investigated in chapter four.

Chapter four, section A centres on the explicit dissidence of literature which may be classified as realist. Representative works of Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov, and Kuznetsov have been chosen in accordance with their stylistic traits. The order of presentation also depends on stylistic traits, moving from that work which most obviously depends upon a correspondence with reality through to the work which is most autonomously fictional. All of the three texts exercise an explicit truth-function, exhibitive of the possible truth of representation in literature. Dissidence is thus content oriented and most obviously ideologically inimical to the doctrine of socialist realism. The second portion of chapter four concentrates, in a similar manner, on texts which display implicit dissidence. The works of Konwicki, Kundera, and

Aksënov are grouped together as postmodernist, investigative of the *essence* rather than the *fact* of reality. Once again, the order of presentation is in accordance with stylistic traits, as each text represents a further degree of recession into the self-consciously fictional. Nevertheless, in each instance, it is shown how these texts are representational of the truth *of* literature. This latter form of implicit dissidence also occasions discussion of the heterodoxy of aesthetic non-conformity to the norms of socialist realism.

The conclusion of this study provides a summary of the issues raised with emphasis placed on the necessarily representational quality of dissident literature. Examination of the ontological nature of dissident literature with emphasis on the function of dissident poetics poses suggestive questions about literature in general. It is also suggestive of my own personal opinion that the defining feature of dissident fiction, as with all great art, is the individuality of artistic vision.

II. SOCIALIST REALISM: THE POLITICAL ESSENCE OF ART

> Our furious enemies in other countries say that we Soviet authors write according to the dictates of the Party. But the fact of the matter is a little different. Each of us writes according to the dictates of his heart, but all our hearts belong to the Party and to the people, whom we serve with our art.
>
> Mikhail Sholokhov

To understand fully the aesthetic composition and political heritage of dissident fiction in the Eastern Bloc, it is necessary to acknowledge the official requirements made of art by the cultural institutions of these countries. It is this matrix of social, aesthetic and ultimately ideological requirements against which dissident fiction reacts (or is seen to react) against. For the purposes of this study, this matrix of requirements may best be exemplified in the official literary doctrine of socialist realism. As the central, formalized doctrine of art in the socialist countries of Europe, knowledge of its "formula," function and purpose is germane to any understanding of dissident art. Without an understanding of socialist realism, dissident literature seems merely a series of works of art which have been censored because of their varying degrees of politically offensive content. In moving beyond the strictly political, it is necessary to enter into the system of socialist-realist art to examine the aesthetic and political requirements placed on art by this doctrine. It will then be possible to conceptualize how aesthetic non-conformity constitutes ideological disobedience as much as open political opposition. This second chapter, therefore, will provide a brief history and description of socialist realism by examining one, the general aesthetic philosophy upon which it is founded; two, the nature of the fundamental principles of socialist realism; and three, the aesthetic and ideological implications of the doctrine of socialist realism for the individual artist.

It must first be acknowledged, however, that as a practical methodology socialist realism retains a somewhat ambiguous status, existing as a literary doctrine between the poles of idealized conception and actual application. Although formalized and official, socialist realism can be thought of as monolithic only in terms of official endorsement. As Katerina Clark has observed, even within the Soviet Union, there is no one accepted formulation.[2] The simple fact that a doctrine of the same name is promulgated in three countries central to this study would indicate that divergences of composition and application are likely. The Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia each have a separate indigenous literary tradition and history of acceptance of socialist realism. After the inclusion of Czechoslovakia into the Soviet orbit in 1948, for instance, socialist realism received immediate, and relatively successful, instutionalization.[3] This is not to suggest that the institutionalization of socialist realism was not forceful, even violent. Nonetheless, there was a literary tradition of proletarian and socialist writing in Czechoslovakia which eased the transition of Czechoslovakian literature to the Soviet style of socialist realism. The Czechoslovakian literary institution adopted the doctrine so quickly, and to such an extent, that Czechoslovakian literature was favoured by Soviet scholars and translators until the time of the Soviet "thaw" and the subsequent assertion of Czechoslovakia's increasing cultural nationalism.[4] Polish artists, on the other hand, begrudged the endorsement of socialist realism in 1950. After the mid-fifties, Polish writers began to reformulate their contacts with "western" literature and increasingly to reassert artistic experimentation.[5] This development of artistic and ideological freedom has been subjected to various government "freezes" of differing intensity. Nevertheless, in Poland

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[2]Katerina Clark, ***The Soviet Novel. History as Ritual*** (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981) 3. This view is corroborated in the exposition of socialist realism in A. Ovcharenko, ***Socialist Realism and the Modern Literary Process***, translated from the Russian (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978).

[3]See for instance, A. French, ***Czech Writers and Politics 1945-1969*** (New York 1982), M. Součkova, ***A Literary Satellite Czechoslovak-Russian Literary Relations*** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) and "Marxist Theory in Czech Literature," ***Harvard Slavic Studies*** 1 (1953): 335-61.

[4]Součkova, ***A Literary Satellite***, viii.

[5]See a very brief description of this period of Polish literary history in C. Milosz, ***The History of Polish Literature*** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) and Z. Folejewski, "Socialist Realism in Polish Literature and Criticism," ***Comparative Literature*** 13 (1961): 72-80.

socialist realism has come to exist as an example emenable to the State's desires, but it does not function as an official policy. Even in the Soviet Union, socialist realism has been the subject of unending debate since its official endorsement in 1934. This debate does not question the theoretical integrity of the doctrine, but instead functions to fluctuate the severity of its application. It would be impossible to denounce openly socialist realism and stay within the terms of the debate, since it is purported to be organically related to the principles of Marxist-Leninist philosophy and the historical evolution of world literature. Furthermore, the Party could never renounce control over a medium seen to be rich in potential for Party self-endorsement and, in extension, the ideological control of the masses. It is the theoretical grounding of socialist realism in Marxist-Leninism which necessitates the acceptance, at least in principle, of socialist realism in all three countries. Countries governed ostensibly by the principles of Marxist-Leninist thought must maintain the Marxist-Leninist mode of artistic production. Any divergence from the central formula of socialist realism is more accurately a matter of national application than that of universal theory. As a principle, however, socialist realism remains sacrosanct, and in times of revisionism, "a stick with which to beat the ideologically recalcitrant."[6]

It is immediately apparent that the socialist-realist method of artistic creation is explicitly and intentionally related to the materialist philosophy of Marxist-Leninism. Indeed, socialist realism may be described as "the method of artistic creation in the light of ideals of Socialism and Communism."[7] This normative stress on socialist realism as *the* method intimates a distinction which must be made regarding the differences between Marxist-Leninist aesthetics, with its attendant concerns on the philosophical nature of the aesthetic, and socialist realism. This distinction will serve to shed further light on the socio-aesthetic, pragmatic nature of the socialist-realist doctrine.

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[6]R. Hingley, ***Russian Writers and Soviet Society 1917-1978*** (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1979). Once again, the stick of ideology has been used much more efficaciously in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union than in Poland.

[7]E. M. Swiderski, ***The Philosophical Foundations of Soviet Aesthetics*** (Boston: D. Reidel, 1979) xvii.

Socialist realism, as its somewhat self-explanatory name would indicate, is a method of artistic production which combines a political purpose--socialism-- with an aesthetic, philosophical means--realism.[8] It is a literature which is socialist in spirit and intent and realist in presentation.[9] This socialist *intent* effectively separates the method of socialist realism from the more philosophically autonomous concerns of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics. Socialist realism is a closed formula with a specific function. It was consciously designed to serve and strengthen the application of Marxist-Leninist philosophy as a whole, to portray realistically the development of history and necessarily, the socialist world. Conversely, philosophical aesthetics seeks constantly to examine and discuss such philosophical topics as the essence and nature of art and beauty, the means of creating art, the processes of receiving and evaluating art, and so on in their relation to Marxist-Leninist philosophy.[10] Marxist-Leninist aesthetics, therefore, is an open field of inquiry in as much as these questions have not been closed to further debate and adaptation, although they are viewed from a Marxist perspective. As a politically imposed and endorsed method, socialist realism is closed; politically it is a non-falsifiable method even though its exact composition may change according to the requirements of changing historic and political contexts.[11] Indeed, much of the questioning of socialist realism as a philosophical construct is a direct result of the application of aesthetic scrutiny to socialist realism in the post-Stalin era.[12] The question of the aesthetic merits intrinsic to socialist realism will be explored later in reference to dissenting

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[8] C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism Origins and Theory* (London: MacMillan, 1973), on page 86, recounts the anecdote which suggests that Stalin coined the term Socialist Realism during a meeting of writers in Gorky's apartment: "If the artist is going to depict our life correctly, he cannot fail to observe and point out what is leading it towards socialism. So this will be socialist art. It will be socialist realism." Cited originally in *O politike partiyi v oblasti literatury i iskusstva* (CPSU 1958) iii.

[9] Erwin Laszlo, "A Survey of Recent Trends in Marxist-Leninist Aesthetics," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 4.3 (1964): 218 and 221.

[10] Ibid 220. The distinction is essentially between a literary theory or doctrine and theories of literature.

[11] I do not feel these changes may be interpreted as the end or decline of socialist realism as some critics have suggested. See, for instance, M. Hayward, "The Decline of Socialist Realism," in *Writers in Russia: 1917-1978* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983) and G. Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism* (London: Granada, 1980).

[12] James P. Scanlan, "The Understanding of Socialist Realism in Contemporary Soviet Aesthetics," *American Contributions to the Ninth International Congress of Slavists*, ed. Paul Debreczeny (Colombus: Slavica, 1983) 387-400.

art. As a functioning theory, however, the only real connection socialist realism has with theoretical aesthetics is at the level of the function of art and the social value of art--concerns which are obviously politically motivated. For this reason, questions pertaining to the aesthetic requirements of art are examined only in so far as they augment the political function of art, indicating once again the pragmatic nature of socialist realism. Thus the theory's name is indicative of the emphasis placed on the function of art. Socialist realism imposes normative criteria on the function (and thus form) of art to promote the Marxist-Leninist world view. The social value of art may be assessed according to the degree by which art marshalls its cognitive, didactic powers to represent the ideological principles of the Party and state.

As an historical event, socialist realism was inaugurated at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 as the official artistic doctrine of the Soviet Union. It is a matter of some debate as to its origins. For some, most notably its detractors, socialist realism was cynically forced onto writers in response to the exigencies of a particular historical context and the personal will of Gorky, Zhdanov, and Stalin. To its proponents, this doctrine is the result of the historical development of art, supported though not formulated by the writing of Marx, Engels, and Lenin only to be articulated later.[13] In accordance with this latter opinion is the evidence of Lenin's earlier writing, the actual literary production of the twenties, and the realist heritage of nineteenth-centuy Russian literature and citicism. Undoubtedly, socialist realism was to a large degree forced upon writers--not having obtained its heightened degree of preeminence solely according to its intrinsic value. Nevertheless, socialist realism does exist as a fact of historical culture with definite theoretical antecedents and to criticize its implementation does little to aid in any understanding of its imposition, function and potential contradictions.

Within the terms of this study, which uses the doctrine of socialist realism as a standard against which dissidence is assessed, the description of socialist realism will be general, inclusive of the varying alterations, evolutions and changes in applications which have

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[13]C.V. James, x.

taken place according to different social and historic contexts. For this reason, I intend to examine five central, related concepts of socialist realism: *narodnost'*, positive hero, revolutionary romanticism, *tipichnost'*, and *partiinost'*. These five concepts function more or less harmoniously according to the logic they establish within the ideologically committed and governed doctrine of socialist realism. According to the ideologically committed nature of socialist realism, primacy is placed on the finished artistic product as a fact of a politicized culture. Simply put, these principles are expressed *through* art. Each concept is more than simply a theoretical construct but also a quantifiable, observable element in art. In this way, each of the principles is of evaluative use as well as normative function. The intentions of the author, the particulars of the form and content, and reception by the audience are of subservient interest, secondary to the social function of art.

Narodnost' is the tenet which emphasises the specific composition of socialist-realist art; it is, therefore, "the meeting point of artistic quality, ideological content and social function."[14] This principle applies to the quality of art which gives it significance to mankind. Best described as "peopleness," art with the quality of *narodnost'* is art for the people and is, in this sense, considered "popular" or "populist" art. The concept of *narodnost'* is formulated out of a Marxist-Leninist conception of social history, particularly as it evolved out of the tradition of such nineteenth-century Russian thinkers as V. Belinsky and N. Dobrolyubov. According to this theory, two major forms of art have developed out of the division of society into classes. Folk or popular art developed among the masses of humans in the proletarian classes, while the oppressing classes developed an individualistic form of art accessible only to the élite. Each class established a mutually exclusive traditon. With the comming of Communism, and the abolishment of social classes, *narodnost'* found renewed application and utility as the quality of art most suitable to the proletarian dictatorship. In his speech to the first Soviet Writers' Congress, Gorky explained the historical bifurcation of culture in terms of the class division of labour:

> Social and cultural progress develops normally only when the hands teach the head, after which the head, now grown more wise, teaches the hands, and the wise

[14]Ibid, 3.

> hands once again, this time even more effectually, promote the growth of the mind. This normal process of cultural growth in men of labour was in ancient times interrupted by causes of which you are aware. The head became severed from the hands, and thought from the earth. Speculative dreamers made their appearance among the mass of active men; they sought to explain the world and the growth of ideas in the abstract, independent of labour processes, which change the world in conformity with the aims and interests of man. . . . And then, among these people, the source of all social ills was born--the temptation of one to wield power over many, the desire to lead an easy life at the expense of other men's labour, and a depraved, exaggerated notion of one's own individual strength, a notion that was originally fostered by the acknowledgment of exceptional abilities, although these abilities were but a concentration and reflection of the labour achievements of the working collective--the tribe or clan. The severance of labour from thought is attributed by historians of culture to the whole mass of primitive mankind, while the breeding of individualists is even credited to them as a positive achievement. The history of the development of individualism is given with splendid fullness and lucidity in the history of literature. I again call your attention, comrades, to the fact that folklore, i.e., the unwritten compositions of toiling man, has created the most profound, vivid and artistically perfect types of heroes.[15]

Bourgeoise, individualistic art, then, was borne out of a culture split from the folk traditions of the people. In socialist societies, art incorporates the best aspects of the folk tradition and fuses them with the new realities of twentieth-century life in a classless society. Socialist realist art containing the necessary quality of *narodnost'* is rooted in the "people," accessible to the people, and expressive of the people. Theoretically, this convergence represents the true socialist realist art of socialist society, in continuation of the natural development of folk art.

A precept related to the principle of *narodnost'* is that of the positive hero. Gorky's celebration of the folkloric in the history and evolution of world literature signals a return to the kind of socially motivated hero found in folklore. The socialist abolishment of class distinctions heralded the restoration of the relationship between man and labour and the re-appearance of the positive heroes of past folk culture once again confident in, and expressive of, the immortality of the labouring class.[16]

> It is most important to note that pessimism is entirely foreign to folklore, despite the fact that the creators of folklore lived a hard life; their bitter drudgery was robbed of all meaning by the exploiters, while in private life they were disfranchised and defenceless. Despite all these, the collective body is in some way distinguished by a consciousness of its own immortality and an assurance of its triumph over all hostile forces. The hero of folklore, the "simpleton," despised even by his father and brothers, always turns out to be wiser than they, always triumphs

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[15]Maxim Gorky, "Soviet Literature," *Problems of Soviet Literature*, ed. H.G. Scott (London: Martin Lawrence Ltd., n.d.) 27-69, 35.

[16]Rufus W. Mathewson, *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1975) 230.

over all life's adversaries, just as did Vassilisa the Wise.[17]

As a component of literary culture, the positive hero of socialist realism has ancestry in such works as Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* and is seen as the necessary opposite to the "superfluous men" of an alienated bourgeoise culture. As manifested in Soviet literature, the positive hero elevates the world as it *is* to as it *should* be. His actions, tempered by unswerving devotion to the Party and its philosophy make him a natural leader capable of inspiring and guiding the masses, for whom he struggles, into a shining future. Thus, the heroic qualities of the positive hero are rendered entirely functional as socialist realism demands of its literature a positive example of adherence to the Party and its ideology.

This mixture of the functional and the heroic is indicative of a third, more controversial precept of socialist realism--that of revolutionary romanticism. Once again, this concept is founded on a representation of reality and social life not as it *is* but as it *should* be, hence, its perceived incompatibility with the verisimilitudinous representation of objective reality as it is. As a concept, it received early support from such artistic legislators as Zhdanov who, in his address to the first Writers' Congress, advocated an act which was not simply depictive of reality but openly creative of the new socialist world.

> In the first place, it means knowing life so as to be able to depict it truthfully in works of art, not to depict it in a dead, scholastic way, not simply as "objective reality," but to depict reality in its revolutionary development.
>
> In addition to this, the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic portrayal should be combined with the ideological remoulding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism. This method in *belles lettres* and literary criticism is what we call the method of socialist realism.[18]

Thus, although revolutionary romanticism is used consciously to romanticize and exaggerate depictions of Soviet reality, it is not incompatible with socialist *realism* since it is an "anticipation" of future life as it undoubtedly will be. As indicative of a writer's imaginative anticipation of life as it will be, due to the historical development of socialist society, revolutionary romanticism may be philosophically linked with, and even expressive of, the materialist philosophy of Marxist-Leninism:

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[17]Gorky, 36.

[18]A. A. Zhdanov, "Soviet Literature--The Richest in Ideas, The Most Advanced Literature," *Scott* 13-24, 21.

> Philosophically, this romanticism has materialist roots; aesthetically, it does not stand in opposition to socialist realism, but at a given stage in the development of socialist literature merges with socialist realism into an organic whole; it can, however, exist to a certain degree autonomously and within the broad framework of socialist realism as the aesthetic system of a socialist society, it can be a specific form of expressing the possible in the real future reached by an artist in his imagination but a future so distant that the bonds between it and today's reality can scarcely be felt.[19]

The prophetic quality of revolutionary romanticism, regardless of its anti-realist implications, is valued as a simultaneously visionary and didactic component of socialist realism.

Often placed in contradiction to the less than realistic ideals of the positive hero and revolutionary romanticism is the precept of *tipichnost'* or typicality. This concept, based on Engel's definition of realism as an "accurate portrayal of typical characters under typical circumstances," represents an attempt to generalize facets of reality, reducing them to components suitable for artistic presentation.[20] Typicality, however, is closely related to the desired essence of historicity or contemporaneity whereby reality is abstracted to represent the typical as a timeless, desired phenomena. Malenkov describes the interpretive quality of typicality in socialist realism as follows:

> In Marxist-Leninist understanding, the typical by no means signifies some sort of statistical average. Typicalness corresponds to the essence of the given social-historical phenomenon; it is not simply the most widespread, frequently occurring, and ordinary phenomenon.[21]

In the context of socialist realism's doctrinal adherence to the Marxist-Leninist ideology, the representation of the typical is *de facto* the representation of what should be typical according to the given socio-historic context. In effect the realist guise of typicality is used to present reality, once again, not as it is but as it should be.

Each of the above precepts of socialist realism then suggest the use of the aesthetic form of realism to represent objective reality according to a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of it. Effectively, it is not the objective matter of reality which is depicted, but the realist creation of reality as it should be. A. Ovcharenko makes this essential "socialist" point very

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[19]Ovcharenko, 214.

[20]See also Mathewson's discussion of Belinsky's concept of the typical, *Positive Hero* 32 and 44.

[21]Quoted from Victor Erlich, "Soviet Literary Criticism: Past and Present," *Russia Under Khrushchev. An Anthology from* Problems of Communism, ed. Abraham Brumberg (New York: Praeger, 1962) 343-59, 352.

clear:

> But our objectivity has nothing in common with objectivism, just as realism has no relation to the imitation of reality. On the contrary, we are not only striving to comprehend the world and man, we are consciously aiming at an active participation in the formation of a socialist personality, socialist social relations and in the repatterning of the world and of man.[22]

Self-evident in Ovcharenko's statement is adherence to a specific vision of social development which is governed not simply by an ideology but, more importantly, the Communist Party, the formulators and arbiters of ideology. With the above four precepts socialist realist art becomes the expression and exemplification of the progressive aspirations of a monolithic, conceptually abstract class. It fulfills the function of strengthening and legitimizing Marxist-Leninist philosophy as the source of objective knowledge and art. Presupposed in all of the above precepts and assumed in Ovcharenko's statement is *partiinost'*, the fifth and last tenet of socialist realism.

Partiinost', or partymindedness, is the fundamental principle of socialist realism; it is the principle from whence the other precepts obtain their defining characteristics, giving socialist realist art its "socialist" function--that of serving the Communist Party in the name of the communist masses. The idea of *partiinost'* is derived from Lenin's adaptation of Engels' concept of *tendentiousness*.[23] Engels used the term tendentiousness to describe artistic identification with a particular social or political cause. Lenin extended the concept by incorporating the idea of artistic allegiance to a particular party, thus consciously emphasising the utilitarian function of literature. Linked to a specific party ideology, art moved beyond simple identification with a cause to an active attempt to redress the issues at the source of the perceived problem. Art would become a weapon of propaganda to fight in service of the proletariat, thus fulfilling Marx's prescription from his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach for philosophers to change rather than simply interpret the world.

Lenin first articulated the concept in Gorky's journal *Novaya Zhizn*, in an article entitled "Party Organisation and Party Literature:"

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[22]Ovcharenko, 258.

[23]The distinction between tendentiousnes and *partiinost'* is essentiallty the difference between social realism and socialist realism

> Be that as it may, the half-way revolution compels all of us to set to work at once organising the whole thing on new lines. Today, literature, even that published "legally", can be nine-tenths Party literature. It must become Party literature. In contradistinction to bourgeois customs, to the profit-making, commercialised bourgeois press, to bourgeois literary careerism and individualism, "aristocratic anarchism" and drive for profit, the socialist proletariat must put forward the principle of *Party literature*, and must develop this principle, and put it into practice as fully and completely as possible.
>
> What is this principle of Party literature? It is not simply that, for the socialist proletariat, literature cannot be a means of enriching individuals or groups: it cannot, in fact, be an individual undertaking, independant of the common cause of the proletariat. Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become *part* of the common cause of the proletariat, "a cog and a screw" of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class. Literature must become a component of organised, planned and integrated Social-Democratic Party work.[24]

Although this article has been the subject of much debate, effectively, socialist realism derives its cohesive, driving force from this single article on the Party and literature.[25] The political strength of the Party takes complete precedence over aesthetic matters; these considerations are evaluated, *ex post facto*, after the ideological requirements have been fulfilled. As a result, socialist realism demands that art serve an ideological function as prescribed by the Party. That function is to further the interests of the masses; art must educate them in the evolutionary processes of history, to show them their role in those processes. Furthermore, these functions and lessons are placed within and emanate from the context of the political concerns of the Communist Party:

> Thus the essential objective criterion for socialist partisanship in works of art must be the degree to which a particular literary expression and its influence harmonize with the struggle and the aims of the party.[26]

Thus, with the inclusion of *partiinost'*, the doctrine of socialist realism closes in on its beginnings to become an unending circle of function and effect, with the whole utilitarian

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[24]V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 10 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962) 46.
[25]Testimony to the all-pervasive force of this concept is its ubiquitous presence in accepted critical scholarship on socialist realism. This is the case from Zhdanov: "Yes, Soviet literature is tendencious, for in an epoch of class struggle there is not and cannot be a literature which is not class literature, not tendencious, allegedly non-political," (Zhdanov, 21) to Ovcharenko: "In so far as philosophy and aesthetics are concerned, the principle of communist partisanship is formed in the process of the practical realisation of Marxism, . . ." (Ovcharenko, 258).
[26]Erwin Pracht and Werner Neubert, "Partisanship," *Preserve and Create. Essays in Marxist Literary Criticism*, ed. Gaylord LeRoy and Ursula Beitz (New York: Humanities Press, 1973) 185-98, 191.

process driven by the Communist Party, the mediator of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, the proposed standard of objective reality in Socialist countries.

Due to the circular, causal progress of socialist realism whereby Party doctrine feeds literature to further strengthen the Party, it is exceedingly difficult to criticise socialist realism from within its terms of reference. One might object that as an attempted realist literary methodology, socialist realism places the cart of socialist ideology before the toiling horse of reality. This since a realist aesthetic presumes and values the objective depiction of external reality unencumbered by service to any given ideology. Indeed, this would be consistent with the basic tenets of epistemological realism even as formulated by Lenin in his notion of the "reflection theory" of cognition.[27] Nevertheless, realism has been coupled with socialist intent, however incompatible the two positions would seem, through the "objective" method of Marxist social analysis making criticisms from outside the ideology subjective. Under such circumstances, serious criticisms are pointless.[28] Simply stated, any critical position not originating in socialist commitment is anachronistic.[29]

It is possible, however, to assess the implications of socialist realism for readers and potentially dissident artists. Absolute faith in an ideology such as Marxism which is normatively imposed presupposes the belief that reality is (or should be) uniform, the same for everyone. In the realm of the aesthetic a prescribed vision of reality assumes that a representation of that reality must be conducted from the author through a fictional text to the reader with changes in form (as, for instance, through typification and romanticization) but not in essence. The truth of reality depicted remains the same for the author and audience in both substance and value. Correspondingly, artistic reflection of reality is assessed as accurate and valuable only if it conforms to specific ideological preconceptions regarding history and social development. Prior assumptions about truth and reality thereby effect the author's presentation of supposedly external reality such that the Party sanctioned view of

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[27]Laszlo, 221.

[28]The lack of aesthetic quality in socialist realist art, particularly because of the ideological demands of *partiinost'*, has been acknowledged by some Marxist aestheticians in the post-Stalin era. See Scanlan, 394.

[29]See Pracht and Neubert.

reality is produced. The elasticity of reality and the individuality of the artist's perception of truth and reality are, for the reader, formalized. The aesthetic value of innovation and the individuality of presentation possible to even realist art is thereby negated by the author's forced ideological service to the orthodoxy of the Communist Party. For the reader realism becomes stale, stagnant, stilted, and more importantly, false. Artistic service to an abstract conception of reality renders the truth of reality as it exists false. Literature comes to represent the world as it should be rather than as it is in the service of ideology--actual famines become in art bountiful harvests. And as the artistic process of falsifying reality continues, truth is ritualized in increasingly recognizable forms, ossified as the essence of the Party's ideology.[30] Such are the issues of reader reception and aesthetic enjoyment; although, it would be false to suggest that there is no appreciative audience for socialist realist literature, especially in the Soviet Union.[31]

Naturally, the system of socialist realism also denotes profound consequences for the artist. The two central components of art, form and content, which are usually used to express the artist's vision of reality, are used to serve the Party and state. Loyalty to the demands of the party, as an expression of *partiinost'*, becomes the prime component in successful art. The ability to work under such conditions demands of the author a specific intellectual and psychological composition. It is this psychological composition which Sholokhov alludes to in the somewhat tautological statement which serves as the epigraph to this chapter. Before writing according to the dictates of his heart the artist's heart must belong to the party. The demands of the state and the intellectual desire of the artist's will are equal. The artist must be willing to merge his conscience with his consciousness, to accept the state's conception of reality. He must have the ability to compose his art as if that reality

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[30]K. Clark in *Soviet Novel* has shown how the artistic representation of reality has served to ritualize reality and history.

[31]For a discussion of the literary tastes and values of the Soviet reading audience see M. Dewhirst, "Soviet Russian Literature and Literary Policy," in *The Soviet Union Since the Fall of Khrushchev* eds., A. Brown and M. Kaser (London: MacMillan, 1975), and the discussion in *Studies on the Soviet Union* 11.2 (1971): Special Issue and K. Clark, *Soviet Novel*. I would suspect that the literary tastes of Poland, for instance, are far more critical of this kind of uniform presentation of reality in literature.

were believed. For it is a specific reality that the artist is forced to portray. This is precisely the psychological condition prescribed by Ovcharenko:

> I repeat, the most profound expression of partisanship is a socialist idea which has fused with emotions and therefore acts on the writer's very vision of reality, on his artistic representation of reality and on his evaluation of it.[32]

To the proponents of socialist realism, those whose hearts belong to the party, this reality is simply the author's conception of life and history as conditioned by the Party's interpretation of Marxist-Leninist philosophy at a given historical moment. To its detractors, this reality has been extrapolated from a philosophy which abstracts reality to form a monolithic theory. It is the final indicator of the power of *partiinost'*, however, which reveals how insignificant that debate is in socialist-realist theory. The demands of the party are simply not questioned, whether they might augment an understanding of reality or not. Without unquestioning loyalty to the party, the mediation between the artist and the accepted version of Marxist-Leninist ideology is lost. The artist thereby loses the function and value of art in a socialist country. Left with his individual vision of reality and truth and, by extension, a new function and value for art, the artist becomes material for dissidence.

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[32]Ovcharenko, 263.

III. AUTHORIAL COMMITMENT: MEANING, TRUTH AND THE READER

> Artistic truth is the act of telling *everything* that is necessary, but telling it *correctly*, that is from a specific point of view.
> D. Furmanov

From the preceeding discussion of socialist realism, it is manifest that the principle of *partiinost'* precludes any real individuality in the artist's presentation of reality.[33] The socio-aesthetic requirements of socialist realism demand that the author present reality according to a Marxist-Leninist perception of it. This, obviously, is the purpose of the normative tenets which constitute the socialist realist method of artistic production. By controlling the artist's creation of even a fictional universe, the party regulates the ideological formulation of the reader's reception of art. Socialist realism is thereby an art of controlled reader reception. To create dissident fiction, fiction which contravenes the formalizing principle of *partiinost'*, the artist needs only to challenge the idealized uniformity of the state's, author's and, by necessity, reader's perception of reality. By creating a lesion in this linear, uniform representation of reality, the artist transgresses the principles of socialist realism and breaks the ideological, inculcating purpose of art. Simply by presenting an individual, non-socialist realist vision of reality through art is to violate the principle of *partiinost'* and enter the nebulous, ill-defined area of dissident fiction--a process that is attended by the omnipresent prospect of censorship.[34]

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[33]I mean individual in the sense of a personal vision of reality, life and the world--one which is not directed by the state's desires. Of course, socialist realist writers are constantly being urged to present the ritualized themes of socialist realist art with their individual voices. There is, however, a qualitative difference between the two types of individuality which strikes at the heart of artistic freedom.

[34]For a discussion of the Soviet censor see the special journal issue devoted to the topic in ***Studies on the Soviet Union***.

It is this presence of the censor which has often been cited as the proof that fiction does have a discernible relationship with reality; specifically, that propositions which purport to truth-value in reality exist in the world of fiction. Literature may thus be potentially dangerous to the state. The mere presence of the censor, however, does not perforce indicate true dissidence. It only indicates that the state controls the functions of literature and, more visibly, operates the institutional means of assessing often arbitrary standards of literary value. This point may be indicated by noting that each of the dissident writers to be examined in chapter four were at various points in their careers accepted and even lauded artists in their respective literary institutions. Truly dissident literature must, in itself, indicate dissent from the prevailing ideology or representation of reality in immanent textual meaning. In this way dissident literature, is a literature of personal commitment.

In postulating that dissident literature is representational of meaning, I immediately anticipate a number of issues concerning the function and purpose of art and its relation to reality. It is also to place special emphasis on the processes of reader reception as the seat of artistic communication which connects the "fictional" world of the text with the "real" world of the reader. This chapter, therefore, will concentrate on the theoretical matter of establishing this suggested connection between fiction and reality in the case of dissident fiction. Specifically, I will establish that through the reader's process of interpretation (the linking of reader reality with the world of fiction), it is apparent that authors have intentions, that meanings are verifiable and logically require authorial intention, and that dissident fiction engages readers in the cognitive function of assessing the truth-value of literature. This study is simultaneously theoretical and pragmatic, connecting aesthetic theory with artistic and critical (reader) practice. I do not intend to show how fiction "might" have a relationship with reality, but that the observable poetics of dissident fiction "require" this connection. Before arguing that position, however, it is necessary to examine briefly the anti-intentionalist argument for the autonomy of art--a position which has received wide currency in twentieth-century theories of criticism and remains felt in the residual hesitancy to ascribe intentions to authors on the basis of reader interpretation. This point is essential, since a

literal application of the anti-intentionalist position precludes the possibility of art displaying specific intended meaning and also serves to exclude the possibility of any truth-function being assigned to literature.

The assault on the legitimacy of authorial meaning in literature arises from the primary observation that art and reality occupy different realms of being, each belongs to a separate "space." The literary artefact, belonging in its fictive space, is autonomous as a self-enclosed system. Fictional literature has a correspondingly autonomous discourse since the semantic meaning of fiction is contained within that system. The fictionality of art thereby removes the author from his artefact. Thus, there can be no proven causal relationship between "how" and "why" a fiction is created and what it "says" to the interpreting reader. Authors may have intentions; it is the text however which contains semantic meaning. Removed from the intentions of an author, art is conceived of as objective, containing centripetal meaning only. This principle of fictionality places constraints on the reader's relationship with fictional literature. Since art is objective, all interpretations must rely on the text's intrinsic properties and assign value and meaning according to the internal evidence provided within the structured unity of the text. To move away from the text, centrifugally, in a direction toward an assessment of the author's intentions or the social context of the text is to commit "The Intentional Fallacy."[15] This position is largely indicative of the theoretical trends of the New Criticism. However, it is also applicable to certain variations of reader-oriented, hermeneutical thought, whereby the historically shifting semantic qualities of language and the fundamental privateness of authorial consciousness and artistic creation render an assessment of authorial intention difficult. Both positions place the interpretation of textual meaning firmly in the possession of the reader allowing the critical act of interpretation to become "a reading of the text." It is this position, in turn, which provides incentives for the overt ideological criticism of the various "revisionist" reading methodologies and the pursuit of autocratic norms in interpretation. Against this, the

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[15]See W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy" first published in *Sewanee Review* 54 (1946): 468-88. Reprinted in *On Literary Intention*, ed., David Newton-De Molina (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh Press, 1976).

intentionalist interpretation returns a standard of authority in interpretation to the author, based on the historical fact of his text.[36] This is to recognize an allocratic norm of interpretation, that readers attempt to reconstruct the author's intended meaning.[37]

If one allows that readers interpret texts to make explicit the "meaning" of literature, it must immediately be recognized that there are three general forms of meaning to be explicated from fiction: a) the meaning of the specific, component words of the text, b) the meaning of the work to the individual reader--broadly speaking, its significance, and c) the full, or aggregate meaning of the text.[38] The interpretation of texts begins with the appraisal of meaning (a), the specific words and phrases of the text, which constitute the intrinsic, internal premises for interpretation. This initial concentration on the intrinsic evidence of a text does not preclude the existence of authorial intention. Indeed, the logic of close textual readings--the appeal to the text--demands the presence of an intending author.[39] Literary texts, as structured entities of verbal meaning are necessarily the product of applied consciousness. And as invariant semantic constructs, literary texts "mean" in the fundamental sense that they communicate via the words with which they have been constructed. Communication, however, is not entirely unidirectional--literary texts must be received by readers in the act of interpretation. Thus, literary texts cannot be said to exist as units of semantic meaning unless they are intended, communicate and are received. This fundamental (self-evident) process centres on the reader's reception or interpretation of the words before him. In Hirsch's terms, this is the necessary fusion of the reader with the horizon of the author's textual meaning.[40] In examining the fictional statements of literature, the reader is forced to make judgements regarding the semantic and syntactic import of the words. These

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[36]The critical literature on the intentionalist/anti-intentionalist debate is copious. For representative positions see David Newton-de Molina, *On Literary Intention*.

[37]For a very interesting discussion of the ideology of interpretation and the distinction between autocratic and allocratic norms of interpretation see E.D. Hirsch, Jr. "The Politics of Theories of Interpretation." *Critical Inquiry* 9 (1982): 235-47.

[38]See Quentin Skinner. "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts." *New Literary History* 3 (1971): 396.

[39]See P.D. Juhl, *Interpretation*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). And, in a similar vein, E.D. Hirsch, Jr. *Validity in Interpretation*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

[40]Hirsch, *Validity* 223.

validating, construing judgements are not possible unless the reader can assume an ordering consciousness as the originator of even fictional propositions and statements.[41] This is because the conduit of literary communication is language. Language (*langue*) is by necessity a public, communal phenomenon which can be used individually (*parole*), as in the creation of literary texts. It cannot, however, be used randomly, without regard for the conventions of public usage. The individuality of expression, therefore, depends on the means by which an author makes words express within the conventions of public usage.[42] Thus, the language of literary texts may be ambiguous, as in the service of aesthetic value and epistemological belief; nevertheless the text must communicate in some way. It is this point which signals the return to the requirement of authorial intention in the creation of literature. Precisely because words may be ambiguous, interpretation, as the process necessary for literary communication, requires the authenticating standard of authorial intention. Without intention words do not mean; without meaning interpretation is not possible; and without interpretation the communication of literature fails. The whole communicative process of successful literature functions as a circle of intention and interpretation--the only variable is the meaning of the language used.

A single citation from Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle* provides an excellent example of an invariant verbal construct which is potentially ambiguous and yet dependent on a specific meaning for the interpretation of the passage and, in turn, the whole novel.[43] The process of textually validating the interpretation to specify meaning, reveals the necessity of authorial intention:

> This man's name filled the world's newspapers, was uttered by thousands of announcers in hundreds of languages, cried out by speakers at the beginning and end

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[41]For the time being I will ignore the assumed truth or falsity of these statements, although the process of validation used in interpreting semantic meaning will be shown to involve a truth-standard.

[42]See Hirsch, *Validity* 231-36 for a discussion of Saussure's distinction.

[43]I am here speaking of the reading process in isolation, as a single segment in the interpretation of texts. This is the first major step, so to speak, into the "hermeneutic circle." It is not, however, the only interpretive process operative at the time of reading. Other factors also influence the overall interpretation of the text concomitantly with reading--factors from assumptions regarding the title and cover of the text to even unsubstantiated knowledge of the author's beliefs and historical contexts.

> of speeches, sung by the tender young voices of Pioneers, and proclaimed by Bishops. This man's name was baked on the lips of dying prisoners of war, on the swollen gums of camp prisoners. It had been given to a multitude of cities and squares, streets and boulevards, palaces, universities, schools, sanatoriums, mountain ranges, canals, factories, mines, state shoemakers' artels, nursery schools--and a group of Moscow journalists had proposed that it be given also to the Volga and to the moon."

This particular paragraph is the fourth in a chapter entitled "The Birthday Hero," which recounts the events of a single night in Stalin's study, although Stalin is not directly named until the eleventh paragraph. In reading and interpreting this passage, it would be possible to assume that the subject, a man whose name had received "thousands," "hundreds" and "a multitude" of positive citations, was being lauded as an individual of venerable character. Yet, one does not interpret this passage as such. The reader is directed to the opposite interpretation, that this passage is one of intense, though restrained disapprobation, regardless of the denotative purport of the words used. In making this necessary, correct interpretation, the reader must refer to the author's intentions via close textual reading and an appeal to the extra-literary context of the paragraph. The possible ambiguities of the passage are resolved initially through the introspective recognition that the verbs referring to the positive citations--"uttered," "cried," "sung," "proclaimed," and "given"--descend to weigthless anonymity and sycophancy in their sheer immensity and in their reference to affairs of abstracted, symbolic importance. Furthermore, they are juxtaposed against the single, visceral sentence: "This name was baked on the lips of dying prisoners of war, on the swollen gums of camp prisoners." Although this sentence is syntactically and semantically similar to the others (e.g. beginning with "This name..."), it radically alters the nature of the reader's interpretation of the entire passage. The single verb "baked" indicates the imposition of pain on individuals, an image which contrasts unfavourably with the surrounding references in its specificity. The reader is directed to reassess his interpretation of the literal meaning of the words.

Futhermore, this single sentence directs the reader's attention to an extra-literary, or social context of the text. The assumed beliefs, emotions and social experiences of the author

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"Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney. (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

constitute a series of vectors for the reader which, when applied to the text, converge on a single interpretation. In essence, the reader is assuming what the author's intentions "might" be. No reader of Solzhenitsyn is unaware that his entire life's work is directed to expose the criminal aspects of Soviet communism, especially as it was expressed by Stalin. The above sentence serves to highlight two particular themes of Solzhenitsyn's denunciation of Stalin; one, Stalin's catastrophic ineptitude as the commander-in-chief of the Soviet Army, and two, his demonic brutality in implementing the full terror of the Gulag prison system. The sentence itself does not explicitly express deprecation for Stalin and yet the reader must interpret it as such and, in turn, re-interpret the whole passage to register that interpretation in its relation to the text as a whole and the context of the author's beliefs--his intentions.

To recap briefly then, it is possible to interpret the above cited passage as an example of a passage arraigning evidence of the laudatory qualities of Stalin, or as an ironic statement registering criticism. In this sense there is semantic ambiguity based on the possible conflicting meanings of individual words and sentences. These ambiguities must be resolved before meaning can be established and interpretation take place. Individual words, sentences and paragraphs must be normalized before the text as a whole can be interpreted. This passage may indicate disapprobation or praise for Stalin. Suggesting that the passage is one of condemnation seems the most plausible and may be validated by indicating that it is the most coherent interpretation given the general semantic function of the whole novel and the context of the author's beliefs. The application of a logic of coherence and function in interpreting structured texts assumes authorial intention. Without the principle of coherence there can be no normative standard for suggesting that this passage, as an indicator of obloquy, is the "best" interpretation. To negate the possibility of a "better" or the "best" interpretation is to permit any interpretation of meaning in a flood of reader subjectivity. And thus, this passage may now mean that the narrator wishes to enumerate the multitude of praises of Stalin.[45]

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[45]I do not wish to suggest that "the" correct interpretation of any text is necessarily possible. My intention is to show that the common practice of textual verification, to indicate a "better" interpretation, in some way assumes the "best" interpretation. Of course, the degree of certainty in any interpretation of meaning depends upon a number of factors, such as genre, theme etc., particular to each text. These are issues which will be demonstrated more fully in the following

Although the language of literature may be denotatively and connotatively variable, the structured unity of artistic communication imposes onto language norms of specificity. From this specificity, the reader recreates authorial intention and designates meanings to establish a functional, coherent interpretation. The validation of interpretations, therefore, is the correspondence of an interpretation with the meaning the text represents.[46] Texts must have conscious, intending authors to mean.[47] In this way an assessment of the meaning of the composite words in a text reveals authorial intention--the necessary requirement for literature committed to a truthful representation of artistic vision. From this position the reader may assess the second of the three forms of meaning indicated earlier, that of the meaning of the work to a particular reader. In Hirsch's terms this meaning refers to the "significance" of the text for the reader.[48]

Even though interpretation involves a process of validation, which requires prior authorial meaning, it does not follow from this that the intended meaning of the author and the artefact's significance for the reader should be synonymous. The object of interpretation is an attempt to re-appropriate authorial meaning; the object of criticism is to apply to meaning reader values so as to re-constitute the significance of the text.[49] Criticism, therefore, assigns significance to the interpreted text according to the reader's matrix of values, or more broadly, his socio-historic context of reception. In reference to the previously cited passage from Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*, it is an act of interpretation to designate the meaning of that passage as one of censure. It is an act of criticism for the reader to designate specific psychological, historical even empirical value to that passage. Criticism and the assignment of significance is thereby dependent upon interpretation, the re-constitution of authorial meaning. Ideologically committed literature, with its attempt to constitute specific meaning naturally directs the type of significance a text has for any reader. It follows that literature

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[45](cont'd) chapter.

[46]Of course, assessment at the literal level, although instructive for interpretation and indicative of authorial intention, is by no means the only process of interpretation. It is useful, however, to observe how authorial meaning is presupposed in an interpretation of even the internal, intrinsic elements of a text, at a level which is most suggestive of the autonomy of literary texts.

[47]Hirsch, *Validity* 10.

[48]Ibid, 8, 141.

[49]Ibid, 211.

with authorial meaning, which intends to transgress the ideological tenets of a given state, will contain political or dissident significance for the reader. In this way the relationship between the text and the reader may be an hermeneutic dialectic, as in conversation. The text cannot speak without the voice of authorial meaning; the reader may not subject the text to a monologue of subjective impressions; there must be an interplay between the two which is always initiated by the author's textual intentions. The text, so to speak, always asks the first question. For it is the author's designation of meaning which initiates the whole process. The author effects the form of interpretation which in turn directs the assignment of significance. Stated simply, the authorial designation of meaning qualifies interpretation and criticism. It will not be the province of this chapter to examine the third and last form of meaning possible for texts--that of the aggregate, whole meaning of the text. This, though the aggregate meaning of the text obviously effects how the reader assesses meaning in individual words, sentences and paragraphs and conditions the kind of significance that the text has for the reader. The matter of the various rhetorical means by which texts reveal meaning is largely a matter of textual verification, possible only after it has been established that authors intend meanings, that the intention is visible and assumed in the process of verification, and that the significance of a text differs from, but is conditioned by, its meaning. These are theoretical matters which are presumed in the designation of a given text as dissident. The last issue to be examined here is also theoretical and of much importance to the study of dissident fiction in particular and all communicative literature in general. The question of the truth *of* or *in* literature is often assumed in discussions about literature but rarely examined as a separate issue. It will be shown here, however, that the relationship between truth and literature is a pragmatic issue which serves to illuminate much of the poetics of dissident literature.[39] It is also of importance since dissident literature has been placed within the

[39]I use the word "pragmatic" quite consciously for two main reasons. First, this relationship concerns itself with the fundamental relationship which exists between text and reader and is pragmatic in that direct sense. Secondly, this study of truth and literature is pragmatic in that the approach used (as will become apparent later) does not facilitate a theoretical understanding of the description and verification of pure truth. Instead, it is concerned with providing a consistent means of describing what takes place when individuals read and feel that a truth-function or value is operative in the text. It is the naive pragmatism of a Dr. Johnson

context of socialist realism, a doctrine which functions to advocate a unique form of truth.

The debate concerning the truth-function or value of literature is centuries old and still attracts considerable attention. For although Plato, for one, exiled the poets from the ideal state for telling lies, the relevance (or lack of relevance) of truth to literature remains integral in every reader's estimation and interpretation of literature. This is so whether the reader has consciously or only intuitively formulated a critical position regarding this question. It will be shown that readers make assumptions about the truth of literature in the process of reading and interpreting. Literature is understood only after it has been naturalized by the reader through reading. Even before the significance and aggregate meaning of the text is assessed, the reader and text meet at the primary level of verbal meaning. In this way there is an obvious relation between the world of the text and the reality of the reader in the cognitive process of reading. Is it necessary, then, that a truth function exist in this relation between text and reader? With the understanding that language fosters, the communicative relation between texts and readers, it may be assumed that a truth-value functions at least on the level of the reception of the semantic meaning of language. Furthermore, since the connection between fiction and reality is relational and hypothetical in nature (existing between authors, texts and readers), the correspondence theory of truth provides a convenient, if intuitive, point of departure for examining the role of truth in dissident literature.[51]

Intuitive, because the correspondence theory of truth is not free of inconsistencies and philosophical shortcomings as an epistemological theory, nor is it the only means of assessing truth in literature. Recent criticism concerning the question of a truth-function and value has

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[50](cont'd) kicking a stone.

[51]In my understanding and presentation of the correspondence theory of truth in particular, and epistemological questions in general, I am indebted especially to D.J. O'Connor, *The Correspondence Theory of Truth* (London: Hutchinson, 1975). Other useful texts are C.J.F. Williams, *What Is Truth?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), Alan R. White, *Truth* (London: Macmillan, 1970), and D.J. O'Connor and Brian Carr, *Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982). To a lesser degree, I must acknowledge Dennis Rasmussen, *Poetry and Truth* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974). Rasmussen offers the correspondence theory of truth, tentatively, as a means of accounting for truth in literature. Ultimately, however, he discounts it in favour of a model which follows Heidegger's truth of the disclosure of being.

centered on Possible Worlds Theory.[51] This theory provides a philosophically consistent means of approaching this issue; a brief examination of Possible Worlds Theory, however, reveals that this consistency is at the expense of emotional satisfaction. Possible Worlds Theory assumes that the fictional universe is ontologically separate from the world of reader reality due to the characteristics of fictionality--literature's individual formal, semantic and illocutionary features.[53] The truth claims of literature must, therefore, be authenticated according to the internal structures and features of the text's fictional universe such that, for instance: "...the narrator's statements cannot be assigned truth-values, since they do not *refer* to a world, but rather *construct* a world."[54] Possible Worlds Theory has this advantage of consistently explaining such "non-realistic" phenomena as unicorns and dragons--things with semantic designation but no denotative extension. It does not, however, explain the fictional relation to reality that reader's intuitively feel and are often meant to feel, as in the case of committed literature.[55] For dissident literature effects stress on the communal aspect of literature, the correspondence between the artist's individual vision and the reception of the reader. To state that the fictional worlds of Solzhenitsyn and Shalamov or even of Aksënov and Kundera did not relate and refer to the real world would be at best naïve, at worst unfeeling. With the intuition of reading practice as a proctor then, the correspondence theory of truth may prove useful, as it is founded on a relational concept of truth.[56] It is also of use for the simple reason that Marxist critics of socialist realism refer to the cognitive powers of art in terms of a reflection (recalling Lenin's theory of cognition) or correspondence between

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[51]For variations on the the Theory of Possible Worlds see such representative statements as: Lubomir Dolezel, "Truth and Authenticity in Narrative," *Poetics Today* 1.3 (1980): 7-25, David Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15.1 (1978): 37-46, and Thomas G. Pavel, "'Possible Worlds' in Literary Semantics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34.2 (1975): 165-76 among others.

[53]Dolezel, *Authenticity* 11.

[54]Ibid, 13 and 20, 21.

[55]For positions that recognize this intuited, emotional sense of truth in literature see: especially Morris Weitz, "Truth in Literature," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 9 (1955): 116-129, William Freedman, "The Relevance of the Truth-Standard," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34.4 (1981): 429-36, A.P. Foulkes "On Wings of Fictionality: Some Thoughts on Literature's Relationship to Reality," in *The Uses of Criticism* ed., A.P. Foulkes (Bern: Lang, 1976), and T.G. Pavel "The Borders of Fictionality," *Poetics Today* 4.1 (1983): 83-88.

[56]C.J.F. Williams *What is Truth?*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976), 74.

reality and art; although, due to the "socialist" precept of *partiinost'* they are careful not to reduce the issue to a representation of life as it is--the province of dissident literature.[57] The relational characteristic will be shown to be operative in the reader's interpretive process of verification, the process by which the truth-claims of literature are measured in their relation to the assumed reality of the reader's world.

The question of truth in literature is essentially an amalgamation of two questions: What is truth? And how is truth verified? Both of these questions are related, since to verify a belief as true requires some conception of the conditions of truth. Conversely, a belief cannot be a candidate for truth unless there are conditions for verification. Because of the hypothetical nature of most of literature's truth-claims, it is the process of verifying truth which is of prime importance. In relation to this point, according to the correspondence theory of truth, truth may take two forms: weakly true or strongly true. This gradation of truth is a result of the qualitative degree of verification possible in establishing a claim as true. For an application to the truth of literature, the truth claims which are strongly true shall be termed "essential" truths, while those that are weakly true will be designated "existential" truths. For example, a proposition may be asserted, accurately and honestly, to describe a given state of affairs and thus would seem to be true. Nevertheless, though this proposition is made accurately according to belief, if it cannot be verified it remains weakly true, i.e. true of the expression of belief only. Propositions which are both accurately and honestly described and actually are affirmed are strongly truthful. This method of ascertaining strong truth has an analogous process in the explication of texts, the process of establishing the semantic meaning of words described earlier in this chapter as meaning one. Thus, it may here be claimed that the logic of interpretation presupposes the establishment of a simple, though indispensable, truth-function. Any descriptive passage may be used to indicate how this truth-function operates. The following passage is from Milan Kundera's *Life Is Elsewhere*:

> For a number of reasons, this scenery was an appropriate setting for the poet's conception: Under the wide gaze of the noonday sun it was a scene of light rather

[57]See N.K. Gay "Truth in Art Truth in Life." in G. LeRoy.

> than darkness, day rather than night; it was surrounded by open nature, suggesting wings and free flight; finally, although not far from the apartment houses on the outskirts of the city, it was a romantic landscape full of crevices and rocks and convoluted ground. It seemed like an eloquent symbol of her experience at the time.[58]

To interpret the meaning of the above paragraph the reader is forced to employ some form of selection criteria based on an understanding of reality. If the reader were to interpret the meaning of this passage strictly, according to the semantic meaning of the words used, problems of meaning with such metaphoric expressions as "the wide gaze of the noonday sun," "a romantic landscape" and "convoluted ground" would arise. Strictly speaking the sun does not "gaze" nor can the landscape be "romantic" or the ground "convoluted." Nevertheless, the reader is able to assign meaning to this passage by corresponding it to experiences of reality. It is not necessary for the reader to have experienced precisely such a scene; it is necessary, however, that the reader be able to imagine such an occasion. The reader's understanding of meaning in this passage is dependent upon the possibility of this semantic construct existing in accordance with the reader's experience of reality. The standard for meaning in this passage, therefore, is the reader's experience of reality or, more accurately, the reader's ability to make the imaginative leap from reality to appearance of reality so necessary for metaphor. Meaning in this sense is verified according to a truth-standard derived from the reader's world of reality. This is "essential" truth since it involves the cognitive assimilation of the primary propositions of literature wherein the author describes a state of affairs which is then verified by the reader.[59] In the language of the Possible Worlds Theory, a truth-standard is needed for the simple reason that authors cannot *construct* recognizable worlds without *referring* to the reader's real world.

Still, the truth-standard necessary for the above passage is one which is intrinsic, operative *in* the text alone. Although, the truth-standard of reader reality is functionally required to establish the semantic meaning of the text, this truth does not extend beyond the fiction to stake a claim in the reader's world as truth-value. When readers claim that a piece

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[58]Milan Kundera, ***Life Is Elsewhere***, trans. Peter Kussi (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).
[59]Essential truth--that of truth *in* literature--will be shown to be especially important in the works examined in chapter four, part A.

of fictional literature is "true," it is not generally in this form of "essential" or "strong" truth that they are claiming. The verification of textual passages through a correspondence to reader reality is so obvious a procedure, due to the communicative function of language, that it is not immediately apparent that a truth-standard is being utilized. Furthermore, the process of establishing essential truths, through verifying propositions as adequately described and accurately affirmed in the real world, does not always apply even within the universe of fiction. The question of counter-factuals, for instance, is not answered according to this procedure of recourse to reality. Readers may accept the description of a unicorn, but it can never be accurately affirmed in reality. Clearly, another gradation of truth is required to account for propositions which describe a belief which cannot affirm it conclusively. In the terminology of the correspondence theory of truth, propositions which are adequately described but not accurately affirmed are "weakly" true. In reference to fictional literature, such propositions are termed "existentially" true.

The term existential truth has been adopted because much of the truth of literature is of an existential nature, concerning the existence of human beings and their relations with one another. This form of the truth *of* literature is hypothetical in nature and cannot easily be empirically validated or refuted.[49] Authors cannot make assertions regarding the human condition with the ease that they describe a landscape as "romantic." Authors do, however, make claims through the themes of their work (these claims may even be explicitly stated). The verification of the theme is effected, to a large degree, by the ability of the author to construct the fiction such that the meaning of each narrative and formal unit affirms the thesis forwarded in the theme. The author describes the proposition and the reader interprets it thus. In this sense fiction can be made to look true; the novel asserts existential truth through the power of description alone.

Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle* provides a useful example of an existential truth-claim in literature. The statement in reference to Volodin: "Now he came to sense a new law, in himself and in the world: you also have only one conscience" is a statement proposing a

[49]This distinction concerning the truth *of* literature will be of importance in chapter four, part B, in the discussion of the postmodernist forms of dissident texts.

truth-claim about the world. Taken in the context of the actions of the novel, it forms one of Solzhenitsyn's central, moral tenets: that the division between good and evil must be decided within each individual's conscience, without recourse to external, politically imposed, idealist beliefs.[61] John Searle claims that this type of statement "is a genuine assertion. It is part of the novel but not part of the fictional story."[62] Surely, however, all parts of the novel are relevant to, and even constitutive of, the story, given that they facilitate a communication of what the author intended.[63] Although authors use different formal and narrative methods throughout their novels, they all belong to the fiction. To ignore them would, in some sense, be a kind of heresy. Solzhenitsyn, in this instance, draws the reader's attention to this kind of statement and invites the reader to place it in the context of the novel's events--the original choice of conscience to make the phone call which endangers Volodin's life and, in turn, draws all of the prisoners to their particular destinies. The events of the novel, therefore, arraign the truth of this statement for the reader to pass interpretive judgement on. This is not the only truth or meaning in this novel, but it is definitely one of them. When individual meanings such as this are collected with the entire collection of interspersed comments and synthesized with the peculiarities of the events and characters of the novel, thematic truths are described for reader verification. Existential truth-claims are thereby proposed in their description as part of the meaning of texts. Once again, Searle suggests that "almost any important work of fiction conveys a 'message' or 'messages' which are conveyed *by* the text but are not *in* the text."[64] Searle is claiming that truths are conveyed by genuine assertions which exist separate from the fictional discourse. The above description of truth in literature suggests that the delineation between the "essential" truth *in* the text and the "existential" truth *of* the text is not easily made. The two features of truth are not mutually exclusive but

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[61]Of course, in the broadest sense of ideology, Christianity is a religion which is idealist and politically charged; nonetheless, it is founded on the primacy of the individual will and the individual's personal acceptance of belief as an affirmation of *faith*.

[62]J.R. Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History* 6.2 (1975): 332.

[63]T.G. Pavel makes a similar point in "The Borders of Fiction," *Poetics Today* 4.1 (1983): 84: "... we often tend to see literary works as unitary cultural artefacts and we assume that gnomic passages belong to the text in the same way as the fictional statements."

[64]Searle, *Logical Status* 332.

rather inter-dependent.

In the above it has been proposed that authors have intentions, that texts have various forms of meanings and that these meanings assume a truth-function and at least a partial assessment of truth-value. These "theoretical" issues are not to be seen as tenets in an argument, but rather necessary factors in an exposition of the poetics of dissident literature. They are each presupposed by an assumption concerning the communicative intent of "dissident" authors. And having conceded that they exist, it is of little difficulty to see the potential power artists have to act as "second governments" in states were the ideological will of the nation is controlled and prescribed by a few, for whatever reasons. The literature of immanent meaning wrests an association with reality that, if truthful, holds real power.

IV. THE LITERATURE OF DISSENT

A. The Witness of Realism

> After all, the writer is a teacher of the people; surely, that's what we've always understood? And a great writer--forgive me, perhaps I shouldn't say this, I'll lower my voice--a great writer is, so to speak, a second government. That's why no regime anywhere has ever loved its great writers, only its minor ones.
>
> A. I. Solzhenitsyn
> *The First Circle*

After having provided a theoretical argument emphasizing the connection between fiction and the reader in reality in the previous chapter, it remains to sample various texts to observe how dissident meaning may be effected in "fiction." This necessarily constitutes a study of the thematic or ideological contents of those texts which dissent by leading the reader through the cognitive exercise of critically re-examining the nature of his past and present social environment. The works to be examined are not arranged chronologically or by country or specific theme, but rather according to stylistic traits. In arranging these texts stylistically, conforming to aesthetic criteria, it is possible to examine their thematic contents through a study of their form. At a pragmatic level, this arrangement is necessitated by the exigencies of the topic. Due to the normative constraints of socialist realism, the standard of literary value, political dissent is possible for the author in a variety of ways according to the particular historical and cultural context. Taxonomy by dissident content is accordingly difficult, making

divisions of style and genre much more suitable.

Following close after a discussion of the truth of literature and the relationship between art and reality, it is appropriate to begin this examination with a sampling of realist texts. The style of realism implicitly recognizes the relationship between fiction and reality from the personalized documentary form of literature through to the implied objectivity of the traditional third person narrative. To reflect this range, the texts selected for study are, in order of presentation: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, Anatoli Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar*, Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales*, and finally Sozhenitsyn's *The First Circle*. As with all selections, this one is arbitrary and in a sense reductive; for it provides an artificial gloss of but a sampling of the possible texts. Thus, a word of explanation is in order. As this study is primarily of a literary, rather than historical or sociological, nature, these texts have been chosen because of their formal or aesthetic qualities. Taken as a whole, these four texts constitute a unique form of aesthetic evolution from the documentary, historical narrative through to the third person narrative, prose fiction. And as a group they belong to the realm of realist fiction. Contained within each is a tangible and assumed relationship between reality as it exists and as it is depicted. Nevertheless, as the texts are presented, there is a qualitative movement from the sphere of the purely factual, with its characteristics and values of truth and verifiability, into the province of the fictional where the truth of representation is tempered with aesthetic function and value. Broadly speaking however, the purpose of all four texts is the same--to redress the falsity of the conventional, sanctioned depictions of life. Though this purpose remains the same in all of the texts, the means to that intended end are different according to each text. These differences in aesthetic function and form require of the reader different strategies for identifying the ultimate intended meaning. This difference in strategies throws into sharper relief the means of verifying artistic truth discussed in the previous chapter. These two forms of truth initiate a differentiation in the type of dissidence--explicit or implicit--which corresponds to the function of representation in literature--that of the analytical or the investigative. The texts chosen here provide excellent examples for examining how authors formulate meaning and how the reader verifies that

meaning according to the conventions of composition used. It is with the explicit dissidence of Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* that we begin the study of the literaure of dissidence.

In a "literary" study of dissident literature Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* is problematical for its function is first and foremost that of a documentary. Sozhenitsyn's book is comprised of a melange of genres constituting an "Experiment in Literary Investigation," an attempt to probe into the *historical* and *ethical* sources and components of an immense penal system. And in this we see an initial example of the analytical function of literature. It is due to the immensity of Solzhenitsyn's investigation that he is led into the multiple forms of composition. Were Solzhenitsyn's concerns strictly historical, the expository narrative of disinterested historical analysis would be sufficient, for as an historical entity the *Gulag* exists as a fact of the twentieth-century Soviet Union, however much it may be ignored or diminished in legitimized accounts. Solzhenitsyn, however, wishes to delve into the human factors and effects of an institution responsible for the deaths of approximately sixty million people. To this end, Solzhenitsyn uses the devices of fictional and belletristic literature to describe passages which could not be described by him according to the conventions of objective, historical narrative. These epic devices usually associated with belletristic narrative are also used due to the nature of Solzhenitsyn's involvement with the topic. As a survivor of the camps, and one who sees the paucity of factual accounts, Solzhenitsyn undoubtedly feels the need for greater emotional involvement on the part of the reader. Furthermore, the book is dedicated to the memory of the untold millions who died in the camps and as a kind of eulogy it must be impassioned with conviction. In a sense, therefore, the nature of Solzhenitsyn's topic and the breadth of his purpose dictated the form of his book, as he himself recognized:

> Of course, to a large extent, the form, compactness, texture and composition of a given work are determined by the material and the purpose of the work. . . . The material itself will dictate the necessary form, just as the material of *Gulag* did to me, without my having to think about what form an artistic investigation should take. An artistic investigation draws upon real-life, factual material (untransmuted, that is), but also employs all the resources available to the artist in uniting these individual facts and fragments, such that the overall design emerges with a conclusiveness no wit less complete and compelling than that of a piece of scientific

research.[63]

It is in turn the artistry and undeniable conclusiveness of this work which make it so compelling to the reader and, simultaneously, so damaging for the state. Solzhenitsyn's varying modes of narrative and the factuality of the presentation of his topic cajole and even bully the reader into forming conclusions about the Soviet penal institution and, more importantly, the social ideology which organizes and enforces such an institution. This is ultimately the purpose of Solzhenitsyn's book--to reveal the truth of the gulag archipelago in the hope that such a revelation should change the way readers think about Soviet society and its history and founding ideology. Solzhenitsyn's task, therefore, is primarily didactic assuming that for the reader resolution and action come with knowledge; hence the danger to the state. The documentary form Solzhenitsyn used was the first step in implementing that purpose by virtue of the effect the form has on the reader's expectations. Readers who pick up and read a documentary realize immediately that in reading the text they are not to suspend disbelief but instead must acknowledge the text's information as true or false. Indeed much of the reader's evaluation of a documentary must centre on the quality of the presentation of the material. The conventions of the documentary serve to collapse the distance between truth or reality and the printed word, the representation of reality. The reader realizes that he is to be situated in an actual historical context. Once in the text, Solzhenitsyn spares no effect in his attempt to bring the reader to the visceral truth of personal involvement in the reality being depicted.

The book begins with a chapter describing a phenomena at the very epicentre of the gulag experience, the arrest. Solzhenitsyn's description is both specific and general. It deals with the historical fact of the arrest of millions, the specifics of Solzhenitsyn's own experiences and, most dramatically, the hypothetical arrest of the reader. The universal is concentrated on the reader:

> The universe has as many different centers as there are living beings in it. Each of us is a center of the Universe, and that Universe is shattered when they hiss

[63]Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "An interview on Literary Themes with Nikita Struve, March 1976," in *Solzhenitsyn in Exile*, eds. J.B. Dunlop, R.S. Haugh and M. Nicholson. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985) 302-303.

at you: *'You are under arrest.'*

If *you* are arrested, can anything else remain unshattered by this cataclysm?"

Once arrested imaginatively in and figuratively by the text, the reader is borne along by a trusted first person narrator who intersperses accounts of the fates of others with comments about his own history. From the basis of the first person narrative, Solzhenitsyn effectively narrates the history of the gulag using the myriad narrative techniques available to him. Here the "chronicalling imperative" is operative as Solzhenitsyn elucidates fact after fact for verification as historically true. This chronicle is not linked to the writing of the historical exposition but instead the narration of events. As a narrator, Solzhenitsyn places emphasis on the material of the camps partially as a result of the difficulty of obtaining the usual expository accounts necessary for historical accounts.[67] Solzhenitsyn relies on human sources and appropriately his narrative reflects the techniques of spoken history. He is in turn sarcastic, ironic, satirical, philosophical and dialogic. Solzhenitsyn's commentary on the extant writings of ". . .the glorious accuser in the greatest trials, subsequently exposed as the ferocious enemy of the people, N.V. Krlenko" provides an excellent example of his historical narrative form. It is an example replete with sarcasm, irony and hypothetical, parenthetical statements which direct the reader to a level of meaning beyond the literal:

> The supreme accuser expresses himself in this sort of language: 'The question of fact is interesting to me!'; 'Define concretely the aspect of the tendency!'; 'We are operating on the plane of analysis of objective truth.' Sometimes, as you read, a quotation from the Latin shines out. (It is true that the same quotation turns up in case after case, but, after several years, a different one does appear.) And no wonder--he did, after all, complete the course in two faculties despite all his revolutionary running around. What attracts one to him are his frank opinions about the defendants: 'Professional scoundrels!' And he isn't hypocritical in the least. If he doesn't like the defendant's smile, he didn't hesitate to blurt out a threat, even before any sentence was imposed. 'And as for you and your smile, Citizeness Ivanova, we'll make you pay for it, and we'll find a way to fix it so that you *never laugh again!*
>
> So, shall we begin? (*Gulag* I, 309-10)

"Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, volumes I and II, trans., T.P. Whitney. (New York: Harper and Row, 1973-75), vol. 1, 3. Hereafter cited in the text as *Gulag* with reference to the volume and page number.

"Elisabeth Markstein in "Observations on the Narrative Structure of *The Gulag Archipelago* from *Solzhenitsyn in Exile*, provides a comprehensive account of the narrative structure of Solzhenitsyn's text and makes the perceptive distinction between the writing of history and its chronicalling.

From sentence to sentence these narrative devices may be accorded alternately to the collective "we" of the reader and other prisoners or to the "they" of the camp guards, administrators and Party officials. Each of these narrative devices and points of view are used as perspectives all focusing in on and providing a complete view of the same essential material and the issues that material provokes for appraisal. These issues, which are at the very core of Solzhenitsyn's dissidence, are made explicit by the personal narrative comments of Solzhenitsyn, the chronicler and witness.

In his generalized musings, Solzhenitsyn is dissident as in his proffering of ideals which are contrary to the tenets of Marxist-Leninism and the ideals of the Party. For instance Solzhenitsyn emphasises the power and sanctity of the individual conscience as the arbiter of real justice: "But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being." (*Gulag*, I, 168) and conversely when he identifies ideology, the absence of individual conscience and consciousness, as the ultimate source of evil:

> Ideology--that is what gives evildoing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the necessary steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps to make his acts seem good instead of bad in his own and others' eyes, so that he won't hear reproaches and curses but will receive praise and honors. That was how the agents of the Inquisition fortified their wills: by invoking Christianity; the conquerors of foreign lands, by extolling the grandeur of their Motherland; the colonizers, by civilization; the Nazis, by race; and the Jacobins (early and late), by equality, brotherhood, and the happiness of future generations.
>
> Thanks to *ideology*, the twentieth century was fated to experience evildoing on a scale calculated in the millions. This cannot be denied, nor passed over, nor suppressed. (*Gulag* I, 174)

In other instances Solzhenitsyn reveals a dissenting voice explicitly, as in his hypothesis that the gulag is necessarily a product of Soviet communism:

> In 1921, in fact, concentration camps were already in full flower (already even *coming to an end*). It would be far more accurate to say that the Archipelago was born with the shots of the cruiser *Aurora*.
>
> And how could it have been otherwise? Let us pause to ponder. (*Gulag* II, 9)

or in his blunt quotation of telling, historically verifiable, though suppressed, statistics:

> According to the estimates of émigré Professor of Statistics Kurganov, this 'comparatively easy' internal repression cost us, from the beginning of the October Revolution up to 1959, a total of. . .sixty-six million--66,000,000--lives. We, of course, cannot vouch for his figure, but we have none other that is official. And just as soon as the official figure is issued the specialists can make the necessary critical comparisons. (*Gulag* II, 10)

Potentially the most damning of Solzhenitsyn's conclusions, however, are his opinions about the nature of the present and future society in relation to this aspect of the past. Discussions concerning the past are inherently ephemeral and may all too conveniently be debated into abstract justifications revolving around "abuses of the cult of the personality" or "justifiable repression." Solzhenitsyn refuses to allow this to happen and in drawing the analogy of the untreated disease speculates on the implications of a denied past:

> . . . our whole country was infected by the poisons of the Archipelago. And whether it will ever be able to get rid of them, only God knows.
>
> Can we, *dare* we, not describe the full loathesomeness of the state in which we lived (not so remote from that of today)? And if we do not show that loathsomeness in its entirety, then we at once have a lie. For this reason I consider that *literature did not exist* in our country in the thirties, forties, and fifties. But because without the *full* truth it is not literature. And today they show this loathsomeness according to the fashion of the moment--by inference, an inserted phrase, an afterthought, or hint--and the result is again a lie. (*Gulag* II, 632)

This quote provides a convenient point at which to conclude this examination of *The Gulag Archipelago* as it is a synthesis of many of the concerns central to this study--truth, literature and dissent. To return to the beginning sentences then, Solzhenitsyn's book is problematical as an example of generic literature. This point, a pedant's quibble, is nonetheless a clue to the success of the book. Few works of literature or history have so used the techniques of artistic writing to chronicle the concealed history of a country. It is only fitting that the urgency Solzhenitsyn feels in revealing the truth of the Soviet past finds expression in reference to that country's literature. A national shadow as large as an archipelago of concentration camps has implications for every aspect of life. The effect it has on literature, which is founded on truth, is emblematic of the effect it has on all of society. To refuse to acknowledge the truth of the past is to participate in and perpetuate a lie. Solzhenitsyn's "literary investigation" is an attempt to dissent, to deny the lie--literature provides the most immediate of tools: "Solzhenitsyn is not out to create a work of fiction here, but a work of truth. Accordingly he uses literature and its devices as mere tools."[61] It is testimony to the power of literature to present the truth of reality as it is that he should use it to implement that purpose.

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[61]Joseph Brodsky, *The Partisan Review* 44.4 (1977): 638.

Like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Anatoli Kuznetsov chose the documentary form of literature to present the material of his "novel," *Babi Yar*. Presumably, it is this form of literature which best serves the purpose of Kuznetsov's text. And as with Solzhenitsyn, Kuznetsov alludes explicitly to the form of his book in his subtitle: "A document in the form of a novel," indicating to the reader in advance the generically mixed form of his text. Kuznetsov's novel, however, differs from Solzhenitsyn's book in essential stylistic features and in the purpose for which it was written. *Babi Yar* is much like a *Bildungsroman*, a narrative account of the experiential growth of a boy through his formation into an adult. The time and place of his "education" into knowledge revolve around the Nazi occupation of Kiev during the second world war. Kuznetsov, as the central character of the novel, recounts his story from the position of adulthood and is thus able to provide analytical commentary based on an historical perspective. He can thereby act the role of guide, one who has witnessed the events and can say to the reader with impunity: "This book contains nothing but the truth."[6] For this reason Kuznetsov uses the documentary form. He must recount the history of Soviet and Nazi occupied Kiev as it was, not as it "might have been" or "ought to have been," conventions applicable to "fiction" and in particular socialist realism:

> So the word 'Document' which appears in the sub-title of this novel means that I have included in it only facts and documents, and that it contains not the slightest element of literary invention--of what 'might have been' or what 'ought to have been.' (*Babi Yar* 17)

The documentary form also grants Kuznetsov the highest degree of direct reference between the truth of reality and its depiction on the printed page. Kuznetsov explicitly wishes the reader to appreciate the quality of this relationship by becoming sensually involved,

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[6]Anatoli Kuznetsov, *Babi Yar*, trans., David Floyd (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980) 13. Hereafter cited in the text as *Babi Yar*. Beyond the obvious interest this novel entails for the reader because of its subject matter, this edition provides the Western reader with a glimple of the Soviet censoring process in the mid-sixties. Published first in *Yunost* in 1966, Kuznetsov was forced to alter the composition of his text to meet the demands of the censor. After defecting to the West in 1969, Kuznetsov republished the original uncensored text and by setting the censored portions in heavy type has allowed the reader to see for himself what was deemed "anti-Soviet stuff" by the censors. Obviously, I am using the second copy, printed in the West, as it allows me to see what was unacceptable to Soviet censors, to visualize how authorial intention is ignored in the censoring process (where entirely new meanings are substituted for the sake of the Party's perception of history and ideology) and relatedly, to respect the desires of the author by acknowledging his intended meanings.

emotionally and even physically, in the events:

> You see, what I am offering you is after all not an ordinary novel. It is a document, an exact picture of what happened. Just imagine that had you been born just one historical moment sooner, this might have been your life and not just something to pick up and read. Fate plays with us as it wishes--we are just microbes crawling about the globe. You could have been me; you could have been born in Kiev, in Kurenyovka, and I could now have been you, reading this page.
>
> So here is my invitation: enter into my fate, imagine that you are twelve, that the world is at war and that nobody knows what is going to happen next. You were just holding a newspaper in your hands with an announcement about people who refused to work. Just now. Right now. (*Babi Yar*, 65)

The division between fiction and reality is voided as Kuznetsov invites the reader to share his fate. Solzhenitsyn also invoked the reading "you," but his purpose was to make the experience universal, Kuznetsov is bearing down on the individual reader to experience very specific events. Both authors wish the reader to learn from the events being presented. Solzhenitsyn, however, approaches the reader as a member of a mass audience or collective. Kuznetsov appeals to the reader as an individual, only secondarily a member of an audience. Partially, this is due to differences in purpose. Kuznetsov is not as concerned as Solzhenitsyn with redressing historical absences and falsities. His purpose is that the reader learn those existential kinds of truths most often associated with the novel and easily distinguishable in the intensity of war. The emphasis, then, is placed on the nature of humanity and the social community, ideology and power. These concerns have potency regardless of the nature of any historical government or ideology.

In his depiction of these concerns, Kuznetsov is dissident since he has committed himself to the task of changing peoples' perceptions, regardless of the consequences for past or present governments. Kuznetsov is inevitably drawn to explicit and implied criticism of Soviet society. Babi Yar, the destruction of hundreds of thousands of humans is exemplary not only as an example of the iniquity of humans but of the attempt by the Nazis and Soviets to replace the facts of human history and memory with monolithic political ideologies, at the expense of human life and freedom.

> What new Babi Yars, Maidaneks, Hiroshimas, Kolymas and Potmas, in what places and with what new, more advance methods, lie hidden in the future, just biding their time? And which of us now living is already perhaps marked out for them?

> I wonder if we shall ever understand that the most precious thing in this world is a man's life and his freedom? Or is there still more barbarism ahead? (*Babi Yar*, 477-78)

In his speculations on these matters, Kuznetsov is most reprehensible to the Soviet state. The state can not allow itself to be distilled to the quintessence of self-serving ideology founded on power, where it becomes indistinguishable from other forms such as Nazism. Kuznetsov does precisely this. An example of his reasoning is worth quoting at length for it strikes at the heart of his purpose, which is to describe if not explain twentieth-century abuses of power in the name of social ideologies:

> I have been telling you what happened to me, what I saw with my own eyes, what witnesses and documents say, and I am now at a dead end. What is it all about? What does it all mean?
>
> Thousands of experts, choosing their terms and quarrelling about them--totalitarianism, authoritarianism, national-socialism, chauvinism, communism, nazism, fascism and so forth, explain them away in retrospect one after the other. But does not the very fact that there are so many of these 'isms', springing up like plague spots, first in one place, then in another, point to some universal tendency? . . . There was no difference in principle between the sadism of either side. Hitler's 'German humanism' was more original and more fanatical, but it was citizens of *other* nations and conquered lands who perished in the gas-chambers. Stalin's 'socialist humanism' did not succeed in inventing the ovens, but on the other hand the disaster descended on our own compatriots. It is in such distinctions that the whole difference lies; it is not easy to say which one was worse. But it was the 'socialist humanism' which came out on top. (*Babi Yar*, 262-63)

Socialist humanism thus becomes but a single manifestation of twentieth century barbarism. More refined, indirect criticism is voiced when Kuznetsov suggests that society's only means of extricating itself from the global pit of Babi Yar is not contained within the progress of science and technology harnessed to still another social ideology, but rather the individual consciousnesses and consciences of the human community:

> But I do know that HUMANISM must at all events be *humane* and not consist of concentration camps and gallows, and that we must not allow ourselves to be turned into idiots. As long as our hearts and brains continue to work we must not give in. (*Babi Yar*, 265)

This prognosis for the "recovery" of society is in open contradiction to the social principles of Soviet Marxist-Leninism which strive for the resignation of the individual will, specifically in deference to the will of the Party, the supposed conscience of the people. In the literary realm, this principle is expressed as *partiinost'*. In these repects, the documentary aspect of Kuznetsov's book, the elucidation of opinions supported by personal experience, is directed

clearly at the reader. The reader is called upon to respond emotionally and intellectually to the book as a document. Judgement of society is inevitable as the reader re-assesses his society and his previous beliefs about the nature of society. The monolithic truth of social ideology is thereby countered with an alternate vision which advances the truth of personal verification--the basis of dissidence. In this, Kuznetsov's documentary is dissident.

Babi Yar is also a novel, however, though not in the usual sense of a fictional prose narrative. Kuznetsov has arranged his text to tell a story about both himself and an historical time of Nazi occupation encapsulated best in the phenomenon of Babi Yar. In consciously selecting and arranging pertinent events for his story Kuznetsov has done as all artists must. In his distillation of that period of time he has molded the events to provide a composite picture which is based in fact, but subjective nonetheless. *Babi Yar* is fictionalized in that it is an individual, stylized reconstruction of history. Indeed, it is the reader's task to estimate the veracity of the picture or judge the extent of the author's subjectivity. Kuznetsov, in forming his story, has included passages describing life as it was which in themselves are dissident because they describe a facet of reality unacknowledged in most fiction. These passages, which are usually the described actions or beliefs of others, are outside the sphere of Kuznetsov's imagination. They are not falsifiable as products of Kuznetsov's interpretation, as for example his ruminations on the nature of ideology or governments are. They are nevertheless the substance of Kuznetsov's story. For instance, Kuznetsov's grandfather who was a Ukranian peasant, the supposed beneficiary of the dictatorship of the proletatiat, was undoubtedly representative of an opinion that was simply not allowed to be voiced in the Soviet Union:

> Fyodor Vlasovich Semerik, my grandfather, hated Soviet rule with all his heart and soul and longed for the arrival of the Germans as liberators, on the assumption that there could be nothing worse in the whole world than the Soviet system. (*Babi Yar*, 38)

Kuznetsov describes in passing how arrests under Soviet rule were made for the most paltry of reasons: ". . .old Zhuk, was arrested for telling a stupid joke in a queue and poor Zhuk vanished at once from sight as though he had been drowned,. . . ." He also describes sympathetically the religious practices of the people, or that Party officials retained "things

most ordinary people could never dream of having (especially if you bear in mind that only recently ordinary people would have had to fight for a couple of days in a queue to get a few yards of cloth.)" Against the official version of Soviet history, Kuznetsov maintains that the historic centre of Kiev, the Kreshchatik, was destroyed by the Soviets and not the German army:

> The whole of Kiev, the whole Ukraine, the whole population knew perfectly well that the Kreshchatik was destroyed by the Soviet authorities. Nevertheless they had it drummed into them that it was the work of the cursed Germans. . . . But the fact remains that the Kreshchatik was blown up by the Bolsheviks. (*Babi Yar*, 85)

None of the above cited examples was used in the text individually to discredit the Soviet regime. They form the incidental facts necessary for a faithful depiction of life as a child in the Ukraine shortly before and during the Nazi occupation. Taken together they form a composite portrayal used to formulate an opinion about larger issues, which implicate the Soviet regime.

In these instances Kuznetsov's text is dissident by virtue of telling unpalatable truths about Soviet reality. The method of recounting these facts and events is not un-realistic and thus is not at variants with the method of socialist realism. The facts themselves, however, are not compatable with the prescribed attempts to describe Soviet society as *it should be*. The ideologically formulated will to a decreed vision of life must take precedence over the truth of personally documented fact for the sake of the Party and ideology. Kuznetsov's "documentary novel" is dissident in its recreation of a segment of the narrator's life and in its explicit assessment of social ideologies in general in the context of Babi Yar. The Soviet denial and suppression of the facts surrounding Babi Yar, the historical event, is indicative of a society's whole way of being, an existence that is expressed in disinformation and falsehood and most poignantly articulated in the words "Babi Yar no longer exists" (*Babi Yar*, 470).

Kuznetsov, then, uses the same chronicalling function found in Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, but introduces some of the stylistic features of the novel to form a vessel in which to carry the truth to many readers. Kuznetsov used for example the isolated event or character portrayal to draw reader attention to specific points of interest central to the main theses of his book. In themselves these devices do not constitute fiction, since the material

itself is factual, yet as a distillation or emblem of a larger truth it is literary fiction's closest neighbour. Continuing in this movement from the factual to the fictional are Varlam Sharlamov's stories of the Soviet labour camps of the Kolyma in northeastern Siberia. His sketches do not form parts of an articulated larger thesis, nor are they intended specifically to comprise a statistical account or historical inquiry. From the fifty-four translated stories contained within *Graphite* and *Kolyma Tales*, the reader is acquainted with the fact of camp life from depictions of individual moments and events.

Shalamov's use of the short story, as the most compact of the prose literary genres, compliments his purpose in writing. Unlike Solzhenitsyn or Kuznetsov, Shalamov does not attempt to cajole the reader into making universal condemnations of the Soviet state or ideology, though the stories do arraign evidence for such a condemnation. The short story instead allows Shalamov greater aesthetic distance, a heightened degree of objectivity, an opportunity to concentrate on the particular without explicit attention to the composite image. And though the majority of Shalamov's stories are first person narratives, he does not engage in polemics. No ideological dissent is registered beyond concerns for the individual conscience and will in the face of camp brutality. For it is the individual man that Shalamov is concerned with, how his spiritual and bodily strength is maintained in the absence of the normal ethical values of the human community.

In the context of these concerns for the individual, the reader is left to consider why Shalamov chose to write these stories, and what it is about them that *feels* dissident. It is his purpose for writing these stories which connects Shalamov with Sozhenitsyn and Kuznetsov. Shalamov, as a witness and participant in the events of the Kolyma, reveals the need to record them, to chronicle them if for no other reason than to bolster the fragile human memory. To allow the Siberian taiga to swallow soundlessly the murdered thousands would be to concede that their lives and struggles were ultimately of no value. These stories attempt to bring the justice of memory to the Kolyma, by allowing each who reads to judge according to his own conscience. For by simply knowing the reader is brought to judgement. Thus, these stories have as their primary task the purpose of making the reading public cognizant, allowing them

to know. And although Shalamov nowhere explicitly states this concern, the reader is led to that conclusion through a variety of means:

> I realized that I knew only a small bit of that world, a pitifully small part, that twenty kilometers away there might be a shack of geological explorers looking for uranium or a gold mine with thirty thousand prisoners. Much can be hidden in the folds of the mountain.
>
> And then I remembered the greedy blaze of the fireweed, the furious blossoming of the taiga in summer when it tried to hide in the grass and foliage any deed of man--good or bad. And if I forget, the grass will forget, but the permafrost and stone will not forget.[70]

This quote, taken from a story about the use of an American bulldozer to bury thousands of corpses in a mass grave, evokes in the reader a sense of pity and futility, primarily because it is shown that a crime of the enormity of burying thousands of murdered corpses in a mass grave could be lost to human memory quicker than to the stones and permafrost of the taiga. Man is potentially as ephemeral as his memory. Shalamov the survivor can preserve the memory of the Kolyma only as a witness: "Only now did I see and understand the reason for all of this, and I thank God that He gave me the time and strength to witness it" (*Kolyma*, 178). And accordingly, as with Solzhenitsyn and Kuznetsov, the role of witness and chronicler forces Shalamov to straddle the realms of fact and fiction. In bridging the distance between these two spheres, Shalamov forces the reader of these tales to consider the factual or historical as well as the aesthetic by interspersing his sparse, aphoristic account of events with historical facts and narrative comment (though these narrative comments are rarely of a moralising nature). In one instance when describing the cafeterias of the Siberian highways, which constitute a kind of crossroads of destiny, a microcosm of Siberian life, the narrator steps outside the story and indicate how the fact of a place, time and event can be used in fiction: "A playwright ought to depict the north in precisely such a roadside cafeteria; that would be an ideal setting. I used the idea later in a story, of course" (*Kolyma*, 161). Shalamov uses this metafictional device to indicate how reality finds its way into the world of fiction rather than the standard use of the convention which is to reveal the fictionality of the literary construct. This, however, is a relatively non-committal reference to the entrance of

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[70]Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, trans. John Glad. (New York: Norton, 1980) 180. Hereafter cited in the text as *Kolyma*.

reality into fiction in comparison to those which can be cited. The narrator, most certainly Shalamov, is not *necessarily* Shalamov--a characteristic of ambiguity which allows for correspondence with the real while maintaining the objectivity of omniscient narration. In other stories the documenting function of the chronicler advances more negative information about the Soviet state in general. "Secrets," for example, are necessarily revealed when "fiction" deals with the unacknowledged aspects of Soviet society:

> 'Do you know the greatest secret of our time?'
> 'What?'
> 'The trials of the thirties. You know how they prepared them? I was in Leningrad at the time. I worked with Zakovsky. The preparation of the trials was all chemistry, medicine, pharmacology. They had more will suppressants than you could shake a stick at. You don't think that if such suppressants exist, they wouldn't use them? The Geneva Agreement or something like that. . .
> 'It would have been too human to possess chemical will suppressants and not use them on the "internal front." This and only this is the secret of the trials of the thirties, the open trials, open to foreign correspondents and to any Feuchtwanger. There were no "doubles" in those trials. The secret of the trial was the secret of pharmacology. . ..' (*Kolyma*, 210)

Shalamov's narrative response to the revelation of this secret is of interest in the context of our study of the kinds of dissidence. He does not offer a condemning commentary but instead listens passively, mirroring the reader's acquisition of the information: "I lay on the short uncomfortable bunk in the empty barracks which was shot through with rays of sunshine and listened to these admissions" (*Kolyma*, 210). Later, evidence corroborating the authenticity of these admissions is cited with reference to a scientific article read by the narrator twenty years after the fact.

These examples and reference to Shalamov's style of composition, are indicative of implied dissidence on the part of Shalamov. One does not get the impression from Shalamov's objective, monotone narrative that he is recounting the horrors of the Kolyma specifically to embarrass or damage the Soviet government. Of course, his material does precisely that by virtue of the fact that it constitutes the revelation of "secrets," unacknowledged contours of Soviet reality. It is the material and the obvious response of the reader, however, which ultimately constitute the negativity, each speaking, as it were, for themselves. Shalamov seems to recede into the objectivity of his style of writing, relying on the reader to verify the facts in his own consciousness and register the disapprobation. Thus, although Shalamov documents

and chronicles like Solzhenitsyn and Kuznetsov, his recession into the "objective" process of fiction becomes the source of the compelling power of his witness. Shalamov thereby constitutes one example of the function and power of dissident fiction.

We now return to Solzhenitsyn to examine an example of the dissident novel. Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle* is useful as an illustration of dissident fiction for two main reasons. Most importantly in our context, *The First Circle* comprises a recognizable form of novel, comfortably placed with the conventions of fictional narrative. Although there are concrete references to the real world and actual events from the author's life, *The First Circle*, like *Cancer Ward* and *One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich*, does not depend explicitly on these references to function as a prose narrative. This is the first novel to be studied here which is a functionally autonomous fiction.[71] Furthermore, *The First Circle* is of interest because of its stylistic features. As a realist novel, *The First Circle* does not violate any of socialist realism's norms of form. It does, however, violate the principle of *partiinost'* which governs the thematic subject and ideological import of literature. In the context of this study, this novel functions as a kind of proto-typic example of the realist dissident novel, functioning as fiction and yet constituting a challenge to the normal, or at least desired, view of reality. For this reason *The First Circle* will be examined at length according to its form, theme and implications for dissident art.

The First Circle is a very tightly structured novel where fictional time and space are distilled to one central location, the Mavrino Special Prison or "sharashka," over the course of three days.[72] Solzhenitsyn does not distort the representation of either element. Indeed, when distilled to their essence, they become emblematic of Soviet society in general, functioning as a massive prison wherein each individual has his own relationship with time--from the "zek"

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[71]By autonomous I do not mean existing entirely separate from concrete reality, exerting centipedal meaning only, but rather a potentially fictional universe with reference value to the real world. See the discussion on the spheres of fiction and reality in chapter three.

[72]In a suggestive article entitled "Political History and Literary Chronotope: Some Soviet Case Studies," in *Literature and History: Theoretical Problems and Russian Case Studies*, ed., G.S. Morson (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986), Katrina Clark indicates how the traditional chronotope (time/space unit) of socialist realism is present in the sharashka of *The First Circle* and much of Solzhenitsyn's other fiction.

doing his time, through the administrators forced to accomplish tasks without the necessary time, to those simply awaiting arrest, and even to Stalin himself awaiting death in a prison-like apartment. The events of the novel are also compacted in time with scenes inside and outside the prison set against each other for contrasting effect. The whole question of freedom is underlined for resolution in the context of the central theme. From the locus of the Mavrino Special Prison, Solzhenitsyn assembles a number of individual characters who each react to the crises their destiny has thrown them. These reactions are framed by and connected to Innokenty Artemyevich Volodin's warning telephone call to Dr. Dobroumov, an attempt to protect the doctor from impending arrest. His decision provides the initial catalyst for destiny. Consequently the action of the novel begins by converging on a theme first presented as an ellipsis in Volodin's thought:

> In the past few minutes Innokenty had felt a calm descending on him; he realized clearly that he had no other choice. It might be dangerous, but if he didn't do it. . . If one is forever cautious, can one remain a human being?[73]

In acting according to the dictates of his conscience, against the safe jugement of reason, Volodin acknowledges that for a human being there is no real choice in situations such as helping or ignoring a friend. In acting as he does Volodin unconsciously answers the perrenial question of Solzhenitsyn's fiction: "What do men live by?" This question, echoed from Tolstoy and posed explicitly in *Cancer Ward*, is in essence a quest for the existential knowledge necessary to judge and govern action or decision.

One of the artistic merits of Solzhenitsyn's novel is the means by which he is able to shift the viewpoint of the novel from one character to the next. This narrative device, which is intrinsic to the appearance of objectivity in the third person narrative novel, has been explained in terms of the polyphonic method.[74] What is important here is that each character gives an answer to the above question through explicit statements or actions. This technique allows Solzhenitsyn to focus on the central ethical issue from a variety of perspectives. Set against the backdrop of their life's course and their individual actions each character

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[73] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, ***The First Circle***, trans. T.P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1968) 4. Hereafter cited in the text as ***Circle***.

[74] Among others see, for instance, Donald Watt, "'The Harmony of the World:' Polyphonic Structure in Solzhenitsyn's Longer Fiction," ***Modern Fiction Studies*** 23.1 (1977): 101-18.

converges or diverges from Solzhenitsyn's position according to their independent personalities and opinions. Volodin and Nerzhin gain understanding through a process similar to them both, though from separate sources; Sologdin and Rubin debate from the perspective of monolithic ideologies and remain transfixed in their respective positions; Kondrashev-Ivanov and Spiridon act according to unarticulated personal beliefs and provide examples for Nerzhin. Independant as they are, each of these characters has been arranged carefully by the author to highlight a specific response which is, in turn, set against Solzhenitsyn's intended meaning. This method respects the individuality of each position, though naturally it does not value them equally, and allows the reader to formulate his own opinion.

The artistry of Solzhenitsyn's composition, therefore directs the reader toward a specific meaning which is centred on, and developed out of, the sanctity of the individual will and conscience. For it is in each individual's conscience that the answer to all existential rights and wrongs is found. Volodin and Nerzhin act out this ethical tenet at the beginning of the novel before having articulated a conscious reason for doing so. The "irrational" decision of each to exchange "the nectar of the Gods for lentil soup," to defy the will of the state for the sake of conscience, precipitates the quest for knowledge in the form of a conscious justification for their action. It is only the reader who receives the pure, abstracted knowledge formulated out of a synthesis of the events and motives presented in the novel. Volodin comes to his knowledge and action through an examination of his mother's diaries and the thought of the Greek philosopher, Epicurus. Particularly, it is reflection on his mother's ethical axioms which leads Volodin to the new truth of a changed perspective:

> 'What is the most precious thing in the world? Not to participate in injustices. They are stronger than you. They have existed in the past and they will exist in the future. But let them not come about through *you*.' . . .
>
> If Innokenty had opened her diaries six years before, he would never even have noticed all these passages. . . .
>
> But even though Innokenty was beyond doubt morally intelligent, humane, loyal and purposeful--it was being purposeful that everyone of his generation valued most of all in themselves and worked at hardest--still, sitting there on a low bench in front of those bookcases, he felt he had found something of what he lacked. (*Circle*, 397-8)

Subsequently, Volodin can no longer remain content with the uni-dimensional truths of egoism or Party ideology, especially if they contradicted the dictates of conscience:

> Up to then the truth for Innokenty had been: you have only one life.
> Now he came to sense a new law, in himself and in the world: you have only one conscience. (*Circle*, 399)

Similarly, Nerzhin begins to appreciate the source of each human's unique essence through conversations with Kondrashev-Ivanov, the artist. Kondrashev-Ivanov disagrees violently with Nerzhin's assertion that "circumstances determine consciousness" and counters with an affirmation of the individual human "I" or conscience:

> 'A human being,' Kondrashev-Ivanov continued, 'possesses from his birth a certain essence, the nucleus, as it were, of this human being. His "I." And it is still uncertain which forms which: whether life forms man or man, with his strong spirit, forms his life! Because--' Kondrashev-Ivanov suddenly lowered his voice and leaned toward Nerzhin, who was again sitting on the block--'because he has something to measure himself against, something he can look to. Because he has in him an image of perfection which in rare moments suddenly emerges before his spiritual gaze.' (*Circle*, 297)

It is precisely this conscience, the measure of perfection, which explains man's irrational behaviour in the face of overwhelming circumstances. It is conscience that compels Volodin to prison through a telephone call to Dr. Dobroumov, and Nerzhin to forsake the "God's nectar" of work in the special prison for the "lentil soup" of existential freedom in the camps. Kondrashev-Ivanov had depicted these very sentiments in a mythic painting of Parsifal's vision of perfection, the castle of the Holy Grail. Kondrashev-Ivanov's painting of a horseman and steed gazing resolutely at the castle of the Holy Grail, oblivious to an abyss which lay between them, contains the essence of dissent at the core of Solzhenitsyn's novel. The individual motivated by the exigencies of personal purpose, particularly the dictates of conscience (the image of perfection), must be steadfast in the presence of all circumstances, the abyss. In this steadfastness to a vision of truth is the freedom which knows no material boundaries. Innokenty Volodin begins to feel it as he settles into the routine of prison and reflects on the pleasure of freedom which comes from acting according to principles, regardless of the gorge of circumstance:

> That meant, according to Epicurus, that what one liked was good and what one didn't like was evil.
> The philosophy of a savage.
> Stalin enjoyed killing--did that mean that for him killing was a virtue? And since being imprisoned for trying to save somebody did not, after all, produce satisfaction, did that mean it was evil?

> No! Good and evil had now been substantively defined for Innokenty, and visibly distinguished from one another, by that bright gray door, by those olive walls, by that first prison night. (*Circle*, 643)

Likewise, Nerzhin comes to recognize that the surest standard for ethical human action is the individual conscience and that functioning according to the standard produces an emotional freedom of its own:

> I had no idea what good and evil were, and whatever was allowed seemed fine to me. But the lower I sink into this inhumanly cruel world, the more I respond to those who, even in such a world, speak to my conscience. (*Circle*, 600)

Nerzhin responds to one of the moral imperatives found in Volodin's mother's notes--to refuse complicity in evil. These imperatives "speak" to his conscience without the mediation of an abstract ideology. They are of the simplicity of Spirodon's folk injunction: "The wolfhound is right and the cannibal is wrong." The location of the division between good and evil is thereby learned by the two prisoners. Knowledge of the truth of conscience frees the physically free man, Volodin, from the falsity of an ideology that enforces ethical opinion according to a political formula. Nerzhin, free in spirit, though a prisoner of doubt, finds the peace of resignation in knowledge of good and evil.[73]

It is interesting that Kondrashev-Ivanov's painting, not unlike Solzhenitsyn's novel, is most dissenting in terms of an applied interpretation. Kondrashev-Ivanov's painting could simply be a replication of the power of the will in pursuit of an ideal--as applicable to the communist striving towards a utopian future of classless perfection as to the individual responding to his conscience regardless of circumstances. The form of the painting is beyond suspicion. Likewise, Solzhenitsyn's novel does not violate the formal tenets of socialist realism. Like the painting, however, *The First Circle* must be interpreted according to the intended meaning which is critical of Soviet reality: first, by virtue of its accuracy of depiction, and secondly, by the themes it espouses as relevant to the real world. In *The First Circle*, as with all of Solzhenitsyn's fiction, continuous references to events and personages

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[73]Katrina Clark, in *Soviet Novel*, describes how Soviet socialist realist writing often centres on the "positive" character's coming into knowledge of the truth or applicability of Socialist thought and ideology. Volodin and Nerzhin, indeed all of the characters to be discussed in the seven texts, exhibit the same process of coming into knowledge through a process reversed from that of the Soviet character, as knowledge here is based on a different perception of truth.

from the realm of reader reality are made. The Mavrino Institute, the setting for most of the novel, is located on the outskirts of Moscow and many of the characters from the novel existed in their fictional roles.'[6] Solzhenitsyn's use of Stalin is exemplary of the evolution of dissident meaning from the depiction of an actual, verifiable person or event to the fictional embellishing of that person or event to elucidate an all encompassing concept. For instance, Solzhenitsyn's physical description of Stalin and the chronology of historical events he participated in are true and yet molded into a composition that registers extreme condemnation:

> And he was only a little old man with a desiccated double chin which was never shown in his portraits, a mouth permeated with the smell of Turkish leaf tobacco, and fat fingers which left their traces on books. (*Circle*, 99)

This kind of condemnation is especially apparent when considered in the context of the heroic traits usually attributed to Stalin. In a single passage, Solzhenitsyn registers severe attaintment by sarcastically using the attributes of conventional depictions:

> The elemental, honest words of this book acted on the human heart with serene inevitability. His strategic genius. His wise foresight. His powerful will. His iron will. From 1918 on he had for all practical purposes become Lenin's deputy. (Yes, yes, that was the way it had been.) The Commander of the Revolution found at the front a rout, confusion; Stalin's instructions were the basis for Frunze's plan of operations. (True, true.) It was our great good fortune that in the difficult days of the Great War of the Fatherland we were led by a wise and experienced leader--the Great Stalin. (Indeed, the people were fortunate.) All know the crushing might of Stalin's logic, the crystal clarity of his mind. (Without false modesty, it was all true.) His love for the people. His sensitivity to others. His surprising modesty. (Modesty--yes, that was very true.) (*Circle*, 100)

These descriptions are dissident in their very negativity. Nevertheless, in themselves, they are subjective descriptions, open to interpretation as truthful or exaggerated and unfounded. When placed in the context of the larger structure of the novel they are far more damaging. Solzhenitsyn places Stalin at the pinnacle of an arbitrary and irrational leviathan of ideology. Stalin's position in the novel is more representational than actual, though the representation takes additional force from the fact of his life. Stated simply, Solzhenitsyn is dissident in regard to the specifics of Soviet society, because that society provides the referential basis for discussion of larger topics. Dissidence goes beyond repudiation of

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[6]For instance, in *The Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn recounts the historically verifiable fate of Stalin's Minister of State Security, Victor Semyonovich Abakumov.

individual matters to more fundamental issues (which in turn reflect back on the society). Stalin, then, functions as the primary mover in an imprisoned society. Nerzhin's and Volodin's quest for existential knowledge and the resolution of that quest must be placed in relation to Stalin and the society he exemplifies. At a superficial level all three are virtual prisoners; Stalin in his bunker-like apartment and Nerzhin and Volodin in their prisons. At a deeper level the difference emerges. Stalin remains ensconced as a prisoner in his half of reality, the ideology that he embodies and enforces. Nerzhin and Volodin live in the other, objective half with their consciences as a guide to existential knowledge. In such a way in reading the novel the reader is drawn to these conclusions. The dynamics of interpretation involve the reader in an assessment of Soviet reality as well as the novel. For, moving from the specifics of a recognizable social context, Solzhenitsyn has constructed a meaning that has implications for that society at an historical, pragmatic level and at a more profound philosophical level. One may reject the implications of the novel at the philosophical level but has, nonetheless, been involved in the dissenting process by admitting the possibility of the truth of Solzhenitsyn's novel at the literal level. Where reality is depicted as uniformly monolithic, the inclusion of an alternate vision is heresy.

This last point brings us to the conclusion. It has been shown that realist fiction--from the factual documentary to the autonomous fiction--involves the reader in methods of verification particular to the conventions of composition used--that the material presented is depicted in such a way as to force the reader to register a correspondence between the events of the fiction and the real world. This necessarily has implications for the kinds of dissidence in literature. The documentary is, by and large, dissident in its presentation of historically verifiable facts which oppose the State sanctioned depiction of historical reality. The documentary chronicles these falsities, and allows the reader to judge the truth by recourse to external reality. As the forms of dissident literature move further into the province of the fictional, texts begin to use reality as a referential basis, or point of departure for the construction of meanings which extend beyond the particulars of a specific context. The specific context, Soviet society, is thereby implicated twice--in the depiction of social

wrongs and the existential issues these wrongs engender. Thus, the reader is forced to verify the truth of the meaning, not by recourse to facts as they are, but as they have been constructed by the author. Though the process of verification is more difficult, the dissident author can be assured that readers, like Nerzhin, appreciate those truths best which "speak to the conscience." This movement from the factual into the increasingly fictional constitutes entry into the province of implicit dissidence and the verification of "existential" truths, the subject of the following section.

B. The Postmodern Accusation

> But who let the genie out of the bottle, who cut themselves off from the people, who groveled before the people, who grew fat on the backs of the people, who let the tartars into the city, invited the Varangians to come and rule over them, licked the boots of Europe, isolated themselves from Europe, struggled madly against the government. We did all that--we, the Russian intelligentsia. . . .
>
> Reflections of this sort, however, will not get the narrative moving forward. It's time to begin, having first said a prayer, and without any fancy tricks.
>
> Vasily Aksënov
> *The Burn*

In the previous portion of this chapter, we have seen how the realist style of dissident literature uses the tangibility of verifiable historical fact and reader reality to construct meanings which are explicitly dissident. Effectively, the author gathers information and analyzes it in a literary manner, using an aesthetic form which matches his factual material with an expository, didactic purpose. The reader's acknowledgement, or reception of the essential truths of these meanings is integral to the successful fulfillment of the author's

purpose. For once again a correspondence between reality and fiction is presupposed. This chapter shall explore meanings which are largely verifiable only from within the fictional construct but which have referents in, and significances for, the reader's world, outside the text. Dissidence in these texts is implicit, borne out of potential meanings and interpreted significances. In keeping to the same linear progression of the last chapter, here from the recognizably factual into the deeper quarters of the fictional, this chapter is also organized along the lines of stylistic criteria. This organizational method will also serve to indicate the dissidence possible, and indeed implied in, formal innovations. None of the texts to be discussed could be considered realist. Nonetheless, it is my contention that all of them refer to the reader's reality not simply through the assertive, analytical channels of realist fiction, but instead through the investigative method of questioning reality, stretching its borders to the limits of the imagination. Contented with this distinction, I shall label the style and form of these texts broadly as postmodern, as each author abandons the epic conventions of realist fiction to play at being fictional, to recede into the conventions of the self-consciously fictional and thereby pose suggestive questions about reality in general and specific cultural and historic contexts in particular. The texts to be examined are, in order of presentation: Tadeusz Konwicki's *A Minor Apocalypse*, Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and Vasily Aksënov's *The Burn*. Unquestionably, it is reductive and perhaps even damaging to attempt to force three such disparate texts into a critical synthesis whereby they may be said to exhibit varying degrees of dissidence. Such a concentration would seem to place the emphasis of these texts on a specific, textual meaning restricted in turn to a specific extra-textual setting. Justification for this synthesis, however, can be registered by noting that it is precisely the inability to pin these novels to a specific meaning which is the nodus of their similarity. These novels exist, to varying degrees as examples of interpretive potential. Each has intended meanings, but meanings which purposefully open the reader's interpretive horizons to a variety of possible ends (significances). To force these texts to the specific context of an overtly ideological, dissident meaning is inimical to both their form and content. Rather, these novels are implicitly dissident, according to the significances they provoke in the

reader (and, inevitably, the state).

It would seem contradictory to claim that the novels under discussion are simultaneously dissenting and yet non-ideological or non-meaning specific. The resolution of this paradox resides in the nature of meaning and significance, as discussed in chapter three. In texts of the previous section, the authors used the conventions of forms of realist writing to create a meaning which had a particular, undeniable significance for the reader. This was due to the specificity of the representation of reality. In the novels under study here, textual meanings cause a potential proliferation of significances for the reader. Reality is not observable as a block of matter but as multi-dimensional--neither is truth directly relational but instead constantly discoverable. In short, this form of the novel poses questions and holds the knowledge of questions examined. Milan Kundera has succinctly stated the purpose and value of the novel in general by describing the ontological difference existing between the relative truth of the novel and the unique truth of an enclosed (in political terms, totalitarian) world-view:

> As a model of this Western world in the Modern Era, founded on the relativity and ambiguity of human affairs, the novel is incompatible with a totalitarian universe. This is a deeper incompatibility than that which separates a dissident from an *apparatchik*, or civil rights campaigner from a torturer, because it is not just a matter of politics or morality, but an ontological difference. That means: a world based on a unique Truth is molded from a quite different substance from that of the relative and ambiguous world of the novel. Totalitarian Truth excludes relativity, doubt, questioning; it can never accomodate what I would call the wisdom of the novel."[11]

As stated above, the wisdom of the novel is the ability to reside in questioning, to maintain the *final* answer in a permanent state of imminence or ambiguity. Consequently, the reader must be able to value the variant significances of the novel rather than simply the semantic meaning. Then the novel may be an "investigation of existence."

To return to the context of dissident literature, this new emphasis on questioning and investigation creates an ambiguity which in itself is antithetical to the values of socialist realist art. At a primary level, the purpose of questioning implies that reality is insufficient for valued artistic representation. The writer is thus immediately beyond the portrayal of a

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[11]Milan Kundera, "The Novel and Europe." *New York Review of Books* 31 (1984): 17.

socialist society as it is or even as it should be. The functionality of art in a communist society is thereby denied. Furthermore, this concern for questioning the very nature of reality pushes the subject matter of art to themes which are forever beyond the known in the attempt to add "to the conquest of being." These themes, as founded on a question, have implications and significances which necessarily doubt the specific historic and cultural contexts they are placed in. Art no longer serves the state and its social ideology, but instead serves the wisdom of investigation and implicitly questions the validity of any construct of reality. This form of art dissents not only through what it says specifically about reality in general but what it "might" be saying or implying about a particular society by virtue of its founding aesthetic rationale. In a word, the epistemological assumptions upon which postmodernism is premised are antithetical to those of scientific materialism.

Tadeusz Konwicki's *A Minor Apocalypse*, the first novel to be discussed, describes the events of a day which is simultaneously banal in its potential meaninglessness and exceptional as the day of an individual's self-immolation. The book is a description of the events of the narrator-protagonist's last day, the approximately fourteen hours before his politically motivated suicide. Permeating the description of the events and speculations of this day is a tone of profound, occasionally angry despondency. It is a despondency provoked by the narrator's realization that his death, though heroic, nobly motivated out of concerns for Poland and her people enthralled in an alien ideology, will constitute little more than a literally minor apocalypse--a potentially nonsensical symbol:

> I would return my life to them the way I had been given it: angrily. A symbol. Yet another symbol. In relation to eternity or to the idiots of the present day? A complicated and indecipherable gesture. A gesture to stigmatize our puppet regime consumed by servility or to indict the eternal Russia hidden behind the moldering façade of the Soviet Union? A protest against the slavery of a society, or of a nation. What sort of freedom are we talking about, for which, of all the many freedoms, will I leap into the fire, the sacred fire of death? What is this anyway, nonsense or Ascension?"[1]

This novel, then, constitutes a kind of testament describing the narrator's (protagonist and author's) spiritual journey through the events of his last day on earth. As a testament

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[1]Tadeusz Konwicki, *A Minor Apocalypse*, trans., R. Lourie. (London: Faber and Faber, 1983) 27. Hereafter cited in the text as *Apocalypse*.

and journey, the novel is comprised of a linear developing plot which gradually ascends to the moment of climax. It is prompted by the request of two aging oppositionist friends that the narrator immolate himself in front of the Party Central Committee building. The idea of this political gesture provides the catalyst for conscious speculation on a variety of themes and ideas latent in the narrator's imagination which are now articulated as the attestation of his mortality. Accordingly, the form is that of the first person narrator. And attendant to the first person narration is a sense of extreme subjectivity which permeates the narrative depiction of such primary external elements as time and space. Things take on the attribution of the narrator's frame of mind. Nature, for instance, is as bleak as the narrator's "dirty hangover" of ennui:

> I woke at the gloomy hour at which autumn's hopeless days begin. I lay in bed looking at a window full of rain clouds, but it was really one great cloud resembling a carpet darkened with age. (*Apocalypse*, 3)

Time itself has seemed to slip its axis, as the narrator attempts unsuccessfully throughout his day to ascertain the actual month and date of his death. The protagonist and reader both "know" that there is an actual time and space "out there." The narrator, however, cannot seem to penetrate it to live in a shared human community. As such the narrator is existentially alone "on the last few rungs up or down a ladder that is without meaning" to speculate on the nature of being. His is the attempt to grasp a fundamental truth which constantly eludes, remains outside of, or even lies hidden within conventional reality:

> And so I would like to say farewell somehow. . . . To say something complete about myself. Not as a warning, not as knowledge, not even for amusement. Simply to say something which no one else could reveal. Because before falling asleep or perhaps in the first passing cloud of sleep, I begin to understand the meaning of existence, time and the life beyond this one. I understand that mystery for a fraction of a second, through an instant of distant memories, a brief moment of consolation or fearfull foreboding, and then plunge immediately into the depths of my bad dreams. . . . And I would give everything I possess, down to the last scrap--but, after all, I don't own anything and so I would be giving a lot of nothing--to see that mystery in all its simplicity, to see it once and then to forget it forever. (*Apocalypse*, 5-6)

Thus the dissidence of Konwicki's novel will arise not out of the sole explicit desire to expose the contradictions of life in a Soviet satellite state, but because this spiritual quest is set within, and to a degree motivated by, the particular socio-historic context of Poland. Konwicki's dissidence is implicit in the author-narrator's examination of being.

In his wandering through Warsaw, the narrator makes obvious disparaging references to the fact of Soviet political domination and its effects on the lives of the people of Poland. It has impoverished the people by forcing them to live in a system that is static, "eaten away by the leprosy of Communism," deadened in all but the totalitarian apparatus of force which keeps it in existence:

> Our contemporary poverty is as transparent as glass and as invisible as the air. Our poverty is kilometre-long lines, the constant elbowing, spiteful officials, trains late without reason, the water cut off by some disaster, or a water shortage, a store unexpectedly closed, an infuriating neighbor, lying newspapers, and hour after hour of speeches on television instead of sports events, the compulsion to belong to the Party, a broken washing machine sold in a state store where you can buy anything for dollars, the monotony of living without any hope whatsoever, the decaying historic cities, the provinces emptying, the rivers poisoned. Our poverty is the grace of the totalitarian state by whose grace we live. (*Apocalypse*, 43)

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the image of the Polish Palace of Culture, a symbol of what the Polish nation and its culture is becoming:

> Immersed in that cloud or in those few consolidated clouds was the Palace of Culture, which once, in its youth, had been the Joseph Stalin Palace of Culture and Science. That enormous, spired building has inspired fear, hatred, and magical horror. A monument to arrogance, a statue to slavery, a stone layer cake of abomination. But now it is only a large, upended barracks, corroded by fungus and mildew, an old chalet forgotten at some Central European crossroad. (*Apocalypse*, 4)

For the world of the narrator is one where the freedom of culture has been infected with ideology, where philosophers lecture censorship boards on the quality of illusion, where film makers constitute little more than fellow travellers "carrying out the Party line in Technicolor," where the state's artists willingly mirror the reality created by the regime, and lastly, where all but a few of the dissidents are co-opted by the state as a kind of legitimizing shadow cabinet. Konwicki, as author/narrator describes this actual world in all of its irreality. But however much the problems of Konwicki's Poland find their expression in, and are even a result of, communist ideology, Konwicki does not end his investigation into the "meaning of existence" with a simple exposition of this truth. And although all the above quotes are explicit in their utter condemnation of Poland and Communism, Konwicki does not, as opposed to Solzhenitsyn or Shalamov, wish only to expose the falsity and dire effects of communist ideology, but rather to discover the teleological principle which orders and causes it all. Dissidence it would seem, is not the primary purpose of Konwicki's novel but instead a

necessary by-product.

The narrator's search into the "meaning of existence" then, is the real quest of his last mortal day. From the Olympian heights of his solitude outside of normal time and space, the narrator is able to feel a synthesis of understanding. The irrational nature of his historical context, Poland of 1979, is understandable only within the extended process of history:

> . . . up close, History is repulsive, foolish, stupid. Only when seen at a distance is it tragic, beautiful, majestic. (*Apocalypse*, 220)

With this realization, the narrator escapes into the existential safety of this transcendant consolation. He literally says good-bye to Hope, Nadezhda, and even reconciles himself to the fact that the West can offer no hope in the near future. With this notion of an extended, ultimately self-justifying process, the narrator understands the nature of the epiphanic realization that he had glimpsed that morning before waking:

> A revelation, a revelation. Yes now I see, now I remember what happened last night. A sudden luminosity at the threshold of a fall or summer night. The sudden, all-embracing certainty that it is we, people, that biological river flowing from one nowhere into the next, we who have created God. Not in seven days, but through ages of glaciers and tropics, through ages of continents being born and seas drying up, through centuries when the cerebral hemispheres developed and the gills died out, through evil centuries and good, through eras that have been fathomed and eras still sunk in toil, pain, and agony our God, the God of mercy and goodness, so that He would protect us against the evil of the universe, the cosmos, or even from that heavenly sky which strikes us with lightening bolts. So that He would protect us from ourselves. (*Apocalypse*, 231)

Justified by this revelation, the protagonist can offer himself in sacrifice to this new God which will lead man out of the mire of his present century. His sacrifice thereby gains meaning, not simply as an isolated response to the Polish regime, but as an act in the creation of a new, ultimately anthropomorphic God.

The irreconcilability of *A Minor Apocalypse* with the prescribed or at least desired art of the Polish state is manifest at a number of levels. Taken as a syncretic whole the novel conveys extreme dissatisfaction with the state of Poland and the historic and cultural setting as a whole; what is proposed to remedy the situation is not the hope of resignation in the materialist process of history. The historical process is in effect returned from Marx to Hegel as the narrator registers dissent by sublimating himself into a private transcendant mythology, an "idealist" process where history advances forward, eventually including the religious

creations of man, but forever beyond his finite demands and aspirations. The investigation into the "meaning of existence" leads not to an affirmation of communist society or even of man, but is initiated by and resolved through initial dissatisfaction with the state and dissent against it as the most obvious source of Poland's misery. Similarly, Konwicki's novel is not dissident for the sake of reacting against a specific *status quo*, but rather an existential search which necessarily reflects on the shortcomings of Polish society. Dissidence, then, is implicit as the fact of conditions in communist society, observable to all, encompases Konwicki's novelistic investigation.

We have seen how Tadeusz Konwicki's *A Minor Apocalypse* functions to create dissident significance for the reader without using the usual conventions of realist fiction. Nevertheless, though Konwicki's novel transgresses the conventions of realist literature by dislocating the representation of time and by the inclusion of the fantastic, grotesque and even irrational, his text still functions as a recognizable novel with a conventional linear plot progression and standard conclusion which "ends" the novel and, simultaneously, indicates the fictionality of it. Essentially Konwicki's has allowed an extreme, individualized conception of reality to function as the vehicle for comment about human reality in general.[9] In the next novel to be considered, Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, some of the conventions of postmodernism are explicitly utilized.

This is immediately apparent in the shape of Kundera's novel, that element which contains within it the *code* for interpreting and understanding the novel as a whole. Kundera's novel is a literary mosaic of seven distinctly plotted stories which taken together constitute the novel. As such there is no unifying story, but instead seven separate stories, connected by the omnipresent authorial voice which points to the themes binding the text together. Accordingly, there is no course of events as in *A Minor Apocalypse*, but a course of narration. The narrator himself, recognizably Milan Kundera, in his varying roles as historical participant in

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[9] I should perhaps state at this point that I believe that, according to one's definition of modernism and postmodernism, all of the texts to be presented in this chapter could fall within the realm of modernism. Precisely due to recognizable significance and reference to specific cultural and historical contexts, these novels are more postmodern in their style than the epistemological concerns they presuppose and exemplify.

the events described or arbitrary author of fictional events holds the text together. The central role occupied by the author/narrator is the source of the recognizable postmodernist conventions--specifically, those conventions governing the relationship between text and author, text and interpreting code, and author, text and reader.[10] The form of Kundera's novel lends itself to the incorporation of a variety of genres, from historical reportage, to philosophical musings on music and laughter and pure inventive fiction. Kundera the author feels no restrictions in the choice of methods for bringing themes into print. Similarly, the reader is frequently invoked to ruminate for his own benefit on the significance of themes presented. These methods, which are outside the boundaries of conventional realist art, are used by Kundera to draw the reader into an "investigation of being." How this has specifically dissident significance is, then, the object of examination in this chapter; it is also a matter of examining a part of a larger whole.

This notion of a part of a whole is integral to an understanding of the function of this novel. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, the investigation is founded on the twin themes of laughter and forgetting, with each section or chapter comprising a variation on these themes. Kundera uses the notion of variations consciously; each chapter and sub-chapter functions as a kind of pensée, a further illumination of a theme capable of infinite permentations. This switches emphasis from the form of presentation to the the idea being proposed. The truth derived by the reader is more important to the author than the accuracy of depiction. For Kundera the obvious "fictionality" of the novel is no hindrance to the investigation of truth and reality:

> The variation form is the form of maximum concentration. It enables the composer to limit himself to the matter at hand, to go straight to the heart of it. . . .
>
> This entire book is a novel in the form of variations. The individual parts follow each other like individual stretches of a journey leading toward a theme, a thought, a single situation, the sense of which fades into the distance.[11]

Although a form of maximum concentration, the "part of a whole" quality of the variation

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[10]For a succinct, readable exposition of some of these conventions see Douwe W. Fokkema, *Literary History, Modernism, and Postmodernism*, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984).

[11]Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. M. H. Heim. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980) 164-65. Hereafter cited in the text as *Laughter*.

constantly implies a larger significance--the notion echoed in the above quote that the letter kills while the spirit gives life. Similarly, the political dissidence of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* is implied as a possible "whole" of significance indicated in many of the "parts" or variations of the themes. This is most obviously the case in the theme of forgetting.

Kundera begins his novel in variations with an example of the organized, enforced forgetting of totalitarianism. He recounts the story of how the Czech Foreign Minister, Clementis was airbrushed from a photograph in which he was shown standing next to the Party boss, Gottwald. All that remained of Clementis in future reproductions of the altered photograph was the fur hat he had lent to Gottwald moments before the photograph was taken. In erasing him from the photo, the state was beginning the process of historical erasure and organized forgetting:

> Four years later Clementis was charged with treason and hanged. The propaganda section immediately airbrushed him out of history and, obviously out of all the photographs as well. Ever since, Gottwald has stood on that balcony alone. Where Clementis once stood, there is only bare palace wall. All that remains of Clementis is the cap on Gottwald's head. (*Laughter*, 3)

This anecdote, which comprises the first section of the first chapter, is typical of Kundera's use of variations. After recounting this historical anecdote Kundera leaves it without comment to begin the story of a man's attempt to retrieve letters from a former lover. This former lover is active in the Party and retrieving the love-letters from her is that man's attempt to obliterate his past, "to hunt down his own deed," particularly that time when he too was active in a Party which had subsequently denounced him. Both stories are set against the backdrop of a totalitarian regime, the events are actually motivated by the fact of a totalitarian power. And both men, Clementis and Mirek, suffer because of that power. Nevertheless, however much this story is charged with political implication and significance, the foregrounded theme is one of forgetting:

> The reason he wanted to remove her picture from the album of his life was not that he hadn't loved her, but that he had. By erasing her from his mind, he erased his love for her. He airbrushed her out of the picture in the same way the Party propaganda section airbrushed Clementis from the balcony where Gottwald gave his historic speech. Mirek is as much a rewriter of history as the Communist Party, all political parties, all nations, all men. People are always shouting they want to create a better future. It's not true. The future is an apathetic void of no interest to anyone. The past is full of life, eager to irritate us, provoke and insult us, tempt

> us to destroy or repaint it. The only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past. They are fighting for access to the laboratories where photographs are retouched and biographies and histories rewritten. (*Laughter*, 21-22)

In this variation on the theme of forgetting, the political and the personal are merged as common proof that "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting." The ostensible variation on the theme of forgetting is loaded with explicit and implicit dissident meaning and significance.

Kundera explores still other reaches of the realm of forgetting for their political significance. When commenting on the fate of the Czech nation, Kundera the narrator steps out of the fictional to recount historical facts which may in turn be woven back into the story. Reality, therefore, is not necessarily denied validity by Kundera but is instead used as the material of fiction for the probing of larger truths. To this end Kundera enumerates historical truths about Czechoslovakia and the slow death of a culture forgotten:

> The bloody massacre in Bangladesh quickly covered over the memory of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, the assassination of Allende drowned out the groans of Bangladesh, the war in the Sinai Desert made people forget Allende, the Cambodian massacre made people forget Sinai, and so on and so forth until ultimately everyone lets everything be forgotten. (*Laughter*, 7)

In another passage, Kundera employs the validating devices of historical reportage, private conversation and acknowledged speculation to invite the reader to join in the speculation on the prospects for the Czech nation and culture when confronted with the organized forgetting of a totalitarian regime:

> The Russians brought him into power in 1969. Not since 1621 has the history of the Czech people experienced such a massacre of culture and thought. Everybody everywhere assumes that Husak simply tracked down his political opponents. In fact, however, the struggle with the political opposition was merely an excuse, a welcome opportunity the Russians took to use their intermediary for something much more substantial.
>
> I find it highly significant in this connection that Husak dismissed some hundred and forty-five Czech historians from universities and reasearch institutes. (Rumor has it that for each of them--secretly, as in a fairy tale--a new monument to Lenin sprang up.) One of those historians, my all but blind friend Milan Hubl, came to visit me one day in 1971 in my tiny apartment on Bartolomejska Street. We looked out the window at the spires of the Castle and were sad.
>
> 'The first step in liquidating a people,' said Hubl, 'is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world around will forget even faster.' . . .
>
> None of us knows what will be. One thing, however, is certain: in moments of clairvoyance the Czech nation can glimpse its own death at close range. Not as an

> accomplished fact, not as the inevitable future, but as a perfectly concrete possibility. Its death is at its side. (*Laughter*, 158-59)

Extracted from the context of the chapter and novel, this kind of passage can be taken as non-fictional and explicitly dissident, an attempt by Kundera to assert the cultural importance of an objective sense of history based on fact. At another level, however, when placed within the confines of fiction, these passages are single variations on a theme used to flush out yet another attributable meaning. In this way, Kundera introduces the factual elements of dissident meaning and significance into the heightened fictionality of the novel.

Still another variation on the theme of forgetting which is critical of the Czech state is the reference to Kundera's own fate after the Soviet invasion of 1968. Forced from work and denied the possibility of future employment, Kundera supplemented his income by writing an astrology column in a government weekly under a pseudonym:

> The only amusing part of it was my existence, the existence of a man erased from history, literary reference books, even the telephone book, a corpse brought back to life in the amazing reincarnation of a preacher sermonizing hundreds of thousands of young socialists on the greater truths of astrology. (*Laughter*, 60)

The irony of an "erased," "forgotten" man of letters writing astrology for the edification of young socialists did not escape Kundera and the laughter this predicament evoked leads the narrative into Kundera's brief treatise on the nature of laughter. In this treatise, Kundera develops a personal mythology to describe the nature of laughter. He describes the creation of laughter and the manichean division of laughter into the laughter of the Angels and that of the Devils, with each form representing a different metaphysical attitude. The devil laughs out of malice in the realization of the cosmic meaninglessness of God's world. The angel laughs out of absolute faith in the rational meaning in divine creation. Out of this binary opposition between anarchic meaninglessness and uncontested meaning may come the synthesis of an equilibrium. Initially, Kundera felt and then witnessed the loss of this equilibrium in the un-tempered faith of some of his compatriots for the secular creation of an edenic idyll of social paradise--a kind of aspiration to the divinity of angelic laughter. Here Kundera indicates another instance of dissidence in the description of laughter and forgetting. For the angelic laughter of the communist idyll is a laughter of forgetting, a sublimation of doubt and

questioning in the afirmation of an absolute social construct. The dissident content of this variation on the theme of laughter is contained in the image of Paul Eluard dancing in an enclosed circle of friends in Prague the day after the death of his friend Zavis Kalandra:

> It was June 1950, the day after Milada Horakova had been hanged. She had been a National Assembly representative of the Socialist Party, and a Communist court had charged her with plotting to overthrow the state. She was hanged together with Zavis Kalandra, Czech surrealist and friend to André Breton and Paul Eluard. And knowing full well that the day before in their fair city one woman and one surrealist had been hanged by the neck, the young Czechs went on dancing and dancing, and they danced all the more frantically because their dance was the manifestation of their innocence, the purity that shone forth so brilliantly against the black villainy of the two public enemies who had betrayed the people and its hopes. . . . But Eluard was too busy dancing in the gigantic ring encircling Paris, Moscow, Warsaw, Prague, Sofia, and Athens, encircling all the socialist countries and all the Communist parties of the world; (*Laughter*, 66)

The execution of an innocent artist and the subsequent denial of his friend, who was acting in the service of a transcendant ideal is reprehensible in itself and dissenting at a literal level. In the context of Kundera's novel as a part in a variation on laughter, however, it gains further significance. Here it is indicative of the angelic laughter of undeviating compliance with an ideal and the fundamental lack of self-examining doubt so necessary for a sense of social equilibrium. Kundera has taken an historical event, concentrated on the metaphoric dance element in it and thus charged the event with a multiplicity of possible significances. For the closed circle of the dance is representative of an absolute ideal which refuses the inclusion of any sense of plurality or ambiguity. And although the image of the dance is almost banal in its innocence, it is indicative of a will to totality which, when applied to the human collective of culture and politics, is most repulsive.

This is the dissidence offered by Kundera through his novel. At the literal level of fiction, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* reminds us of the need to recognize the relative, ambiguous nature of life; that man needs two kinds of laughter. This is an assertion made through Kundera's very method of writing which speaks through the relative truth of indeterminant meanings. He also reworks the theme of forgetting in a series of variations to speak directly to the reader in social reality. His attempt to maintain memory is in part an assertion of the existence of shared external reality. For although amorphous and obscure as historic, cultural memory is the sharing of impressions, if not facts of a once determinate

past. That cultural memory is shared by the community of a single culture as historical fact, and vulnerable to falsification through totalitarian machinations, is testimony to its objective, though mortal, existence. Moreover, to return to Kundera's specific context, this intrusion by the Czech and Soviet states upon cultural memory is most insidious precisely because it is ultimately an attack on the concept of objective reality.[12] Thus, besides using narrative techniques which purposefully direct the significance of his fiction out into reality, Kundera's artistic variations on forgetting affirm the existence of a fragile reality in general, and his apprehensions for an occupied Czech culture in particular. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* is, therefore, a novel which functions to direct an interpretive whole to dissident significance. His novel also uses the indeterminacy of the postmodern form to make an additional extra-textual comment on the novel and reality--not that it is unknowable, but that it must constantly be protected and explored through a questioning art. This in itself is dissident, since reality is necessarily outside the bounds of any monolithic ideology and, obviously, the art of that ideology. Kundera, besides creating dissident content through the form and objectives of his novel, introduces the devil's mocking laughter in the divine presence of Czech, communist ideology and art.

The devil's anarchic laughter is, in turn, an excellent image with which to describe the dissidence of the seventh and final text of this study, Vasily Aksënov's *The Burn*. For amongst the texts studied here, it is Aksënov's novel which most revels in the play and self-conscious artifice of fiction, making it the most difficult novel to approach and normalize through use of the regular conventions of exegesis. This to such an extent that it borders on folly to attempt to reduce *The Burn* to the sole level of political significance. Like Kundera, Aksënov's fiction is a "whirl" of styles and tropes which extend beyond the usual depiction of art and reality; this being in itself an indication of the personalized, dissenting vision of Aksënov's fiction manifested at the level of form. In an interview with Inger Lauridsen and Per Dalgard, Aksënov indicates the strange, necessary connection his art has with reality in terms which are suggestive of Kundera's investigation or "conquest of being:"

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[12]This point is reminiscent of one of George Orwell's fears of totalitarianism which matches with Kundera's obvious concerns. See Michel Heller, "History as Contraband." *Survey* 26.2 (1982): 186.

> In *The Burn*, I wanted to obtain everything, to whirl it around in all possible ways: formal, philosophical, historical, political. Now, a more peaceful, "piano" work is present--*Paperscape*. Earlier, I wanted to conclude a thing with a kind of "surrealistic spiral;" to take off from the earth's surface--and that, evidently, shall also happen later on, though always with an emphasis on the earth.[13]

Unlike the Kundera of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Aksënov does not provide the reader with an explicit account of his themes and techniques. Rather, he throws the reader into his labyrinthine, lyrical text, forcing him to respond and interpret as a means of arriving at meanings and significances. And given the style of Aksënov's novel, this is appropriate since, as we shall see, *The Burn* does not function to create a traditional even fragmented narrative story, but instead a kind of composite impression which is representational and communicative though not based on a specific plot.

Since this novel gains much of its force from its style of composition, it is necessary to appreciate the function of its stylistic and formal features. Subtitled "A Novel in Three Books (Late Sixties--Early Seventies)," *The Burn* begins with a "book" entitled "The Men's Club." This beginning chapter introduces the five central characters, all of whom share the same patronymic and a similar, though as yet unexplained, past. These men, artists and scientists, all exhibit the same kind of violent, promiscuous, anarchic life-style of heavy drinking and frequent clashes with various elements of a repressive establishment. They are described through a series of third person narrative accounts, flashbacks, reminiscences, first person conversations, and first person, plural exhortations. The time and location of this first book is, broadly, the late sixties in Moscow (with excursions actual, remembered and imagined to the Crimea, Magadan, Katanga and Europe). Within the context of the novel,

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[13]See Inger Lauridsen and Per Dalgard, "Interview With V.P. Aksënov," in Edward Mozejko, ed., *Vasilly Pavlovich Aksenov: A Writer in Quest of Himself*. (Columbus: Slavica, 1986) 24. In this same vein, though here looking at the implications of this style for content, is Aksënov describing the possibly ideological nature of "an emphasis on the earth:" "Literature can be anything, including tendentious, if it is also literature. 'The Tare of Barrels' is in part emphatically tendentious: it insists on the right of man to love and to faith. If a writer is indignant about Viet Nam and writes about it for the purpose of shocking the Pentagon, the result will not be literature. But if he begins from a small factual point and proceeds by unpreconceived paths, spontaneously, the tendency will emerge all the same and will have a stronger effect." See Priscilla Meyer, "Interview With Vasily Pavlovich Aksënov." *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 6 (1973): 573.

the action takes place over the course of approximately three days. Time and space elide, however, as the real-time and flashbacks of one character converge onto still another character's time and location without any sense of logic or the traditional realist continuity of apparent causality. Accordingly, the mood of this chapter is one of Gogolian fantasy, where the grotesque and the real mix in an atmosphere of hang-over induced nihilism and abject political cynicism.

The second book, "Five in Solitary" begins with a series of authorial, meta-critical comments in which Aksënov reflects on the purpose and value of writing in the context of Soviet reality, its history and unique social personality. Aksënov's initial statement:

> Before embarking on the second book of this narrative, the author is obliged to state that he aspires to penetrate with extraordinary profundity into the problem that he has chosen.[14]

is one which must be read aware of a certain degree of the author's self-conscious irony. Nevertheless, Aksënov is refering to that analytical, referential quality of his writing which entrenches the novel in the realm of the real, albeit through the investigative, literary conduits of the grotesque and fantastic. And in keeping with his stated desire to plunge into the "problem that he has chosen" book two begins "without any fancy tricks." In book two, the reader is acquainted with the childhood of the ubiquitous Tolya von Steinbock. The narrated history of Tolya's childhood life is presented in an interrupted, though linear, realistic manner. It becomes increasingly apparent that he is the "ur" character or the polypersona, the source of the mysterious similarity between the five Apollinarieviches; von Steinbock is each of them as a child:

> Ah, Tolya von Steinbock, timid creature full of obscure impulses, did you imagine, as you stood beneath the gilded fretwork frame of the security forces' wall newspaper *On Guard* that you would one day be related to the pimply saxophonist Samsik Sabler, that you would sleep in a marble hollow on the tail of your own dinosaur, that you would become renowned in Black Africa as the inventor of the microscope, that you would achieve fame as the author of books and scientific formulas and as a mysterious being of the night, a successor to Don Juan, yet always remaining the same Tolya von Steinbock, even lying on the concrete floor of a sobering-up station in a pool of poisonous drunkards' piss? (*The Burn*, 193)

And as the reader places each of the characters in the context of his past, as told in the

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[14]Vasily Aksënov, *The Burn*, trans., M. Glenny. (New York: Random, 1985) 221. Hereafter cited in the text as *The Burn*.

description of Tolya's youth, the fragmented narrative begins to bind together in reader comprehension. With this acquired knowledge of the past comes a sense of perspective which is, simultaneously, the cohesive element in the novel and its primary source of dissidence. Just as each of the five central characters depends on their history in Tolya, so too the novel's dissidence rests in Tolya's youth. Raised in circumstances which are undoubtedly drawn from Aksënov's own experiences, Tolya indicates how representative portions of the generation of the late sixties and early seventies were born in Stalinism. Thus Magadan in the late forties becomes the socio-cultural context for understanding the dissidence of this novel. And accordingly, the dissidence of *The Burn* is primarily dependant on the reader's recognition of actual historic social circumstances and personages. These are the "small factual points" which shall procede along "unpreconceived paths."

Literally as a child of the purges--his parents, like Aksënov's, were first arrested when he was very young--Tolya grew up in the artificial normalcy of the transit town of Magadan, watching people move to and from freedom and penal servitude. All attempts to integrate himself into "normal" Soviet society, represented by the prison-like atmosphere of Magadan, were irrecoverably lost for von Steinbock (and subsequently the five Apollinarieviches) when his mother was arrested for a second time:

> It was only now that Tolya at last grasped the full implications of the event: His mother was being taken away to an unknown place, for an unknown reason, and for an unknown length of time. Without wasting any words, but also without cruelty, brutality, or violence, they were removing his mother, whom he had only come to know in the last few months, who still made him feel embarrassed, who in the evenings recited to him from memory the poetry of Blok, Pasternak, Mayakovsky, Gumilyov, Akhmatova, and who used to recall, or perhaps invent, funny stories about his childhood that had occurred before the catastrophe of her first arrest. She had almost become his real mother. What reason had he to feel ashamed? Why had the Komsomol, the basketball team, Lyudka, and all the rest of it ever seemed more important than his mother? (*The Burn*, 303)

In a single passage such as this, Aksënov is able to weave together a variety of levels of fiction and reality, creating a dissident force out of the relatedness of social reality and fiction. Magadan existed as a transit camp/town servicing the prison camps of the east--Aksënov, himself spent time their as a child with his mother, Evgenia Ginzburg. In the context of the novel, it is also the setting of a young boy's awakening into Soviet life, the

locus of experience which conditions the mood of the entire novel. And furthermore, intertwined with the experience of life in Magadan comes the one other realistic depiction of a life and personality which function in all stages of the novel, Cheptsov. As the Magadan interrogator of Tolya's past, he too brings the history of Tolya von Steinbock to the lives of the five main characters in the late sixties. Described over the course of fifteen pages in a realist style, Cheptsov is representative of the slightly weakened--in terms of Stalinist times--secret police which nonetheless remains omnipresent in Soviet life and which is forever attempting to return to the powers and methods of the past. The Stalinism of Magadan in the late forties is, therefore, physically present in contemporary times as well as in the memories of the children of the purges.

From this fictionalized basis of historical and personal fact, Aksënov creates a kind of verbal mural, a melange of impressions painted out of the broad brush strokes of flashbacks, reminiscences and experiences which are held together by the universality of the created mood across the various characters. Because Aksënov is attempting to create an impression of this society, rather than an epic reproduction, the fantastical and fictionalized style of postmodernism is of greater use than the realist form of artistic re-creation and mirroring. Ties are not severed with the "actual" state of Soviet society and history because of this form; instead the representation of reality is stylized to convey observable truths which concentrate on the feeling created rather than the thing in itself. Fiction intrudes on the real to recast the real in a different, revitalized form, one which is impressionistic and not mimetic. For instance, Aksënov describes an event which is taken directly from his own life. Pantelei Apollinarievich Pantelei, the writer, is forced to appear at the Kremlin before Khrushchëv on March 8, 1963, just as Aksënov did.[15] In the description of Pantelei's experiences, however, events are cast in the light of the fantastic to illuminate the real and yet grotesque characteristics of the actual meeting:

> 'Dear comrades dear Nikita Kornponevich from this exalted rostrum I wish criticism directed against me justified criticism of the people makes one think about

[15]For a description of this event see J.J. Johnson Jr., "V.P. Aksënov: A Literary Biography," in E. Mozejko, ed., *Vasily Pavlovich Aksënov: A Writer in Quest of Himself*. (Columbus: Slavica, 1986) 36.

> responsibility to the people to you madam I beg pardon slip of the tongue truly beautiful images of contemporaries and greatness of our everyday life despite attempts of imperialist agents dear comrades like my great teacher Mayakovsky who in the words of the unforgettable Joseph Vissarionovich was and remains I am not a communist but--' (*The Burn*, 119)

Khrushchëv is referred to as Nikita Kornoponevich and references references to the future removal of Khrushchëv by neo-Stalinists is made in the form of a scheming guard appropriately named Beriya Yagodovich Gribochuyev:

> Excited shouts from the liberals greeted this hadshake, which was their salvation too, but Sergeant Beriya Yagodovich Gribochuyev of the cloakroom guard was so annoyed that he pinched his own left testicle: The setup hadn't worked; old Kornponevich had failed to take the bait! (*The Burn*, 122)

These allusions to historical events and personages, then, are not made for the literal truths they represent, as, for instance, a writer like Solzhenitsyn would use them. The historical events instead provide a venue for immediate movement into a larger impression. In the above instances, it is one of humiliation, paranoia, absurdity, humour etc., all of which are mixed together by the forced prostration of an artist before the state. Throughout the course of the novel there are many such fictionalized references to recognizably actual aspects of Soviet society and history--from the invasion of Czechoslovakia to the torture of a single individual. All of these images taken together as a whole create a novel which dissents from conventional depictions of Soviet life due to a form which condenses a vast panoply of images into an opaque, and yet tangible, impression of pity and disgust for Soviet society:

> My Motherland is not audacious. She may be cruel, but she is meek. She breathes through her mouth because she has adenoids and nostrils blocked by Stalinism, and her forehead, beautiful as the dome of the Monastery of the Trinity, is covered in pimples. My Motherland is going to engage in a life-and-death struggle on the ship's deck. My Motherland wants to run away from herself to America.
>
> I don't want to run away! I toss from side to side, from the past to the future. Don't carry me away, don't carry me away to America. (*The Burn*, 378)

Thus far I have described what is in effect ideological dissent, in that this form of dissent reflects primarily on the collective, social quality of Soviet life. In the context of Aksënov's novel, and in the postmodern novels of Konwicki and Kundera examined above, there is another kind of artistic dissidence intertwined in in the formal and ideological dissidence of these texts. By their very structure, these novels represent a form of revolt against party norms, since the accepted forms of literary representation are controlled--to

differing degrees in varying historical periods--by the Party and state. Paradoxically, with this new form of literature, which would seem to eschew mimetic reproductions of social life, comes the representation of social phenomena not usually covered in legitimized art or dissident works of realist art. As such, the almost naturalistic interest of these postmodern texts on such issues as crime, sex, alcoholism, mental disorders etc., would almost seem to constitute a separate form of dissidence. With sex, for instance, representation may take an implicitly ideological turn when, for example, a representative of the state security apparatus, Cheptsov, is explicitly described in the repugnant act of raping his step-daughter. The depiction of sex may also be dissident simply because it breaks with the norms of conventional artistic depiction; as in Kundera when the discussion and representation of sex is used as a means of focussing on existential issues without reference to an overt political ideology. Undoubtedly, this interest is yet another example of the investigative function of this form of dissident literature, with these themes providing convenient vistas to new, unexplored aspects of existence. Each provides a way out of the normal into the "conquest of being."

This final point returns us to the premise of this chapter and its conclusion. We have seen how this will to style immediately implies an apostate vision of communist reality since it refuses, on the basis of ontological assumptions, to be bordered by an ideology, any construct which delimits reality. The novels of this postmodernist style, as they recede into the conventions of the fictional, progressively reduce dependency on concrete reality as the basis of dissidence. Instead dissidence is implied and verified from within the terms of the fictional construct. The reader acknowledges certain references to reality, but due to the exigencies of form must depend on the author's depiction to assess any truth-value. The author, in turn, abandons the dissidence of explicit reference for the more inclusive form of investigative writing, assured, in the final analysis, that the very creation of a negative impression is dissenting in the context of the state's unique truth.

V. CONCLUSION

To conclude this study of the poetics of dissident literature and to attempt to assess its possible implications on the form and process of the novel, I would like to redirect attention to the opening remarks of the introduction. There, it was proposed that dissidence not be considered a quality simply of kind but rather of degree, one which is manifested in intensity according to a variety of literary and extra-literary conditions. It was also assumed that the necessary condition of all dissident literature is the individuality of authorial vision and literary representation. I attempted to establish those general assumptions as valid, not with recourse to abstract argumentation, but through the examination of a series of texts according to their assumed dissenting function. To prove, in this sense, was to test. This method of investigation was predicated on a series of *a priori* assumptions concerning the communicative, representational function of literature. These assumptions were shown, in turn, to depend upon the intentions of authors to create meaning and the ability and necessity of readers to appraise that meaning through a cognitive function. Just as authors must have intentions for literature to dissent, so too must readers employ a truth-standard to verify the dissent.

I believe that with the individuality of authorial vision the truth-standard and function of the novel is integral to literature which dissents. It is in the recognition and validation of a "new" truth of artistic portrayal that opposition to the unique truth of socialist realist art is offered. The quality of the novel as representational assures the co-existence of the two concepts. In stressing the extreme importance of a functioning truth-standard, I attempted to indicate how the interpretive process necessary to all literature is dependent upon this standard. In the case of dissident literature, a literature which requires some form of meaning to dissent, this is self-evidently so. The bi-part division of truth found in the correspondence theory of truth provided an excellent model for the study of dissenting literature. This is so not simply because the relational concept of truth found in this theory is

indicative of both Marxist epistemology and the referential quality of literary language use. But also because the division between the strongly and weakly true led conveniently to a division of types of dissent--explicit and implicit--matching, once again, the two broad classifications of possible dissident literature--the realist and postmodern novel. Although I maintained this oppositional division for the purpose of explication, I was able to demonstrate how the two types of novel and corresponding types of dissidence are not mutually exclusive, but rather inter-dependent. I could develop this point further in a longer study by indicating how, in the context of socialist realist literature, realist fiction may be implicitly dissident simply through the positive representation of such taboo subjects as religious faith, sex, psychological illnesses *et cetera* (for instance, in Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle* references to Western writers, philosophers and religions in the form of chapter headings may be deemed an iconoclastic act). Similarly, the postmodern works of assumed implicit dissidence contained many instances of explicit condemnation which could only be regarded by Communist States as open provocations. What remains of general importance here however, is how each form depends upon the same interpretive process of the reader, and the assumed intentions of the author. By placing emphasis on authorial intention and reader verification, I showed that in the case of dissident literature the aesthetic and didactic function of literature co-exist on a continuum with no absolute distinction between the two possible. In this respect, I feel that the results of a study of the poetics of this particular kind of literature may, with speculation, be suggestive of the function of the novel in general.

In a recent study, exemplary of certain trends in modern literary theory, Linda Hutcheon attempted to indicate the unique attributes of the metafictional or postmodernist novel by dividing the novel into the two main categories of the "mimetic of product" and the "mimetic of process."[16] This oppositional division is based on the representational function of the novel and the assumed intentions of the author. In one instance, the author attempts to represent reality as artistically quantifiable; in the other the author foregrounds the creation of an illusion. This division of types of novel, indicated also in the study of dissident

[16]Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (New York: Methuen, 1984) 38-39.

literature, is used by Hutcheon to extirpate the validity of a truth-standard and identifiable meanings to allow readers a creative function in the interpretation of novels. The self-conscious fictionality of metafiction is seen to invite this creativity of interpretation at the expense of authorial intention and meaning in any form of novel. I would suggest that Hutcheon's rigid division of types of novel, with its consequences in the interpretation of authorial meaning, is erroneous given the example of dissident fiction. As long as literature is assumed to be mimetic or representational (as it must, given the referential function of language in the novel) then the two forms of mimesis--that of product and process--must not be given ontologically separate functions. There are, to be sure, degrees of stress given to each function; yet, the interpretive process as delineated in the example of dissident literature allows for the interplay of both as an expression of meaning and significance. Out of the slightest of assumed authorial meanings Aksënov creates many possible significances while Solzhenitsyn in specifying his intended meaning delimits the reader's creation of significances.

I do not wish to belabour this somewhat ancillary and abstract question. I propose it simply as an example to emphasize the diverse possibilities and implications of dissident fiction; stressing once again, albeit through oblique channels, the amorphous qualities of dissident art. For the dissident novel, from Sozhenitsyn to Aksënov, is capable by turns of stressing the aesthetic and ethical possibilities of art, successfully maintaining its function as an arbiter of social concerns from within the parameters of aesthetically pleasing and innovative art.

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